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OR,  
**BLACK BILL at  
BAREFOOT BAR.**

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN.

CHAPTER I.

THE LETTER WHICH GAVE THE CLUE.

THE dusk of the night was coming fast over hill and dale.

It was early spring.

The way was wild and rude—more trail than road, winding amid the rocks—fringed here and there by clumps of timber. A more lonesome place, at such an hour, could not well be found.

Yet we write not of some wild Western trail, but of a road within rifle-shot of one of the old-

**TETON TOM THE  
HALE BLOOD**

"I AM A DECOY TO LURE YOU TO YOUR DEATH, TETON TOM!" THE GIRL EXCLAIMED.



est cities in New England, fair New London, nestled by the broad Thames.

This rude apology for a road quitted the main highway, the northern "pike," a short eighth of a mile below the spot of which we write, and here a second road, as much a trail as the first, split off from the other and went up into the hills.

At the junction a man stood, dressed plainly in dark clothes, with a broad-brimmed slouch hat, such as is common in the West; a noble-looking fellow, nearly six feet high and magnificently muscular, a frank, open face, smoothly-shaven, and almost as dark in hue as an Indian's visage; his raven-black hair too was long like a red-skin's, but came down upon his broad shoulders in curling locks.

In his hand the man held a fragment of a letter, the blackened edges of which showed that it had been exposed to the peril of fire.

He read the writing upon the fragment aloud:

"The twentieth of the month—April—I will meet you at N. L. I have discovered the hiding-place of the old woman, and if the son lives—as I believe—we are not secure until he is put out of the way. It is important that we do this work ourselves for it is not safe to trust to other hands; therefore we must not be seen together. On the twentieth—time it so as to arrive in N. L. about six o'clock in the afternoon; take the N. road; about two miles out turn to the left—it is the first road, and more like one of our wild Western trails than a road in a civilized country; a short distance and you will come to where the road splits in twain; there I will meet you and—"

Here the epistle stopped short; the beginning and the end were missing.

"Although this letter was not intended for me yet I am here," the man remarked, a determined look shining in his clear eyes. "It is the twentieth of the month, the hour of six is past, and I wait for the coming of a man whom I have never seen—whose name I know not, and yet whom I intend to hold to a bloody reckoning."

"From the shadows of the Rocky Mountains have I come, where the Teton River pours its icy flood down into the mighty Missouri, and here in the very heart of the old-time civilization I mean to call this Unknown to an account for his wrong-doing in the land of the setting sun."

Then a slight noise fell upon the well-trained ears of the Westerner and he hastened to seek concealment in the thicket near at hand.

It was but a big dog, on a foraging expedition intent, probably.

The stranger kept to his lair. The minutes lengthened into hours, he heard the distant church-bells ring, the big round moon came slowly up, and upon looking at his watch he found that it was after eight.

He made a gesture of impatience.

"Something has occurred since the letter was written to make these men change their plans, and I will only have my trouble for my pains," he muttered. "Which of these roads would my man take? Evidently he has a rendezvous somewhere in the neighborhood on one of the roads—hark!" he cried, abruptly. "A horse has turned into this trail from the main road! It is probably my man!" And with a gleam of satisfaction on his dark face he sunk back again to his concealment.

The sound of the horse's hoofs grew louder and louder, but the animal was only approaching at a walk, and the practiced ears of the watcher soon detected that there was something the matter with the animal.

"The horse is either very tired or lame," he muttered.

Then up the road, distinctly visible in the clear moonlight, came the horseman.

A young, good-looking, muscular fellow, with blonde hair, bright blue eyes and that unmistakable look which comes from birth and breeding only.

He was handsomely dressed and rode a good-looking, blood-bay horse which was so lame that it was as much as he could do to limp along, and the rider evidently was very uneasy.

"Great heavens!" cried the Westerner, the moment he got a good view of the horseman's face, "this man is the living image of Randal Crawford—Randal Crawford as he was thirty years ago! He is not the man I seek, for my fellow is a man well in years, according to the best description which I could get of him."

The rider stopped his horse some twenty feet below where the Westerner was hidden.

"It is a shame to burden the poor beast with my weight!" he exclaimed as he leaped nimbly to the ground. "A shame even to force him to go on in his disabled condition. I do not understand it, for the beast seemed all right when I started."

One of those powerful impulses which sometimes seize upon men prompted the stranger to step forth and speak to the horseman.

"Hello! something the matter with your horse?" he asked, as he advanced into the road.

"Yes, the brute is dead lame," the horseman replied, surveying the striking person of the other with a curious glance.

"Let me take a look at him; I am somewhat of a jockey."

The stranger examined the horse's leg.

"The trouble is in the hoof. Aha! there has been foul play here! See!"

From the hoof he drew a small nail, which had evidently been placed in it in such a way that it would gradually produce lameness, as the pressure of the hoof upon the ground forced it gradually up into the quick.

"I am amazed!" the horseman cried. "Have you not made a mistake—is it not an accident?"

"Oh, no, the nail was inserted in such a way as to gradually lame the horse. Are you on a quest where it would be to any one's interest to have you detained?"

"Hardly; I am on my way to my mother, who is so ill that she is not expected to live until morning. I have been summoned home to receive her dying words. She lives about half a mile off, at the end of this upper road. I am a student at Harvard College, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and was summoned home by telegraph. As I got off the train at the depot here in New London, a man accosted me, saying: 'Your mother has been dreadfully worried for fear you would not come in time; here is a horse ready for you.' I mounted and came on at a good pace until the horse became lame."

"Is this your mother's horse?"

"No, hers is an old family beast, suited for a nervous woman."

"The man was a stranger?"

"Yes; but not suspecting that anything was wrong, I took no particular notice of him. I doubt if I would be able to recognize the fellow if I saw him again."

"And ten minutes' walk will bring you home?"

"Yes."

"The horse was fixed so as to force you to walk the latter part of the way. This road seems to be a lonely one—"

"There is not a house until you come to my mother's."

Then to the mind of the stranger came the passage in the letter, which had by a strange accident fallen into his hands: "I have discovered the hiding-place of the old woman—and if the son lives—we are not secure until he is put out of the way."

Did not this refer to the young man and his mother?

"Have you any enemies who might wish to harm either you or your mother?"

"None that I know of!" replied the other, in amazement.

The Westerner meditated upon the situation for a moment. The conviction had seized upon him that an attempt would be made to assault the student as he walked along the lonely way, and he was calculating whether it was safe to allow the other to go on; finally he resolved to permit him to decide.

Hurriedly he explained his suspicions, and why he had them.

"I will go on!" the student exclaimed, immediately. "I can hardly believe that either my mother or myself can have enemies desperate enough to meditate murder, and as for the West, my mother has never been in Montana, to my knowledge, nor has she any relatives, friends, or even acquaintances there. My name is George Haven, the same as my father, who died when I was about five years old; he was a sea captain."

"You are the living image of a man who once held a very prominent position in Montana, and when I first saw you I was startled. If you choose to risk going on I will follow a little in the rear, so if you are attacked, I can come to your assistance. Unless you are killed outright by a gun or pistol-shot, I will be able to rescue you."

"We are not in the wild West, but in the civilized East, where assassins seldom are found," the student replied, with a smile.

"Crime lurks everywhere, and it is the unexpected that always happens!" the stranger rejoined.

"Go on, I will follow; it can do no harm."

The horse was fastened to a tree, and then up the lonely road at a brisk pace went the student; a hundred yards behind, gliding over the ground with the noiseless stride of the red brave when stealing upon a sleeping foe, came the dark-faced stranger.

Backward two hundred years the age had gone, and the Pequot's day had come again to this wild, rock-ribbed land.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE ATTACK.

Not a sound was there to denote that there was a human within miles of the spot.

The frogs croaked in the lowlands to the right of the road, and the mournful hoot of the screech-owl sounded dimly.

On the two went; the student's footsteps ringing out sharply along the rocky, winding way; the road descended into a little valley, preparing to climb a sharp ascent, around which it wound in a curious fashion, known locally as the S of Red Hill. Here there was a thick growth of chestnut and oak, deeply shading the road.

As the young man got well into the gloom there was a peculiar whirr in the air.

The sound came distinctly to the ears of the

trailer; he had heard it too often not to understand what it meant.

A lasso had been thrown.

The student started the moment the noise fell upon his ears, and involuntarily threw out his hands, but the coil of the lariat—the rope a rawhide one, strong enough to hold a wild buffalo—settled around his shoulders, then tightened, and he was hurled violently to the earth, the concussion stunning him.

The moment the deed was done, forth from the shadow of the trees into the road leaped two dark forms.

"You have done the trick, Bill, to the queen's taste!" cried one of the men, in a strong, harsh voice—the voice of a man used to command.

"Wa-al, I reckon I ain't swung a lariat for years down on the Mexican perairies for nothing!" the other replied, using the tones of the wild, rude frontiersman, the desperado of the desert.

"And now that the prey is secured, we must give him his ticket to the happy hunting-grounds—send him to join the father, who, no doubt, is waiting anxiously for the coming of his son and heir."

"Shall I use knife or pistol?"

"Neither!" the other answered. "There must be no trace of violence on the body, nothing to raise the murder hue and cry. The man is stunned and helpless. I have a vial of chloroform and a sponge; it will be an easy matter to strangle him with the stuff, then we will drag the body into the bushes, and put it in some secluded nook at such a distance from the road that it will not be apt to be discovered for some time. In the interval, the insects, the birds, stray dogs, and such like vermin, will so sadly disfigure the body that it will be hard work for any one to tell the cause of the death; no marks of violence will be found upon the corpse, and the chances are great that it will be presumed that death came from natural causes; the young man was, probably, under the influence of liquor, wandered from the path, fell and choked to death; that is a reasonable supposition, you know."

"Oh, yes, Lordy! w'ot a head you have got!" cried the other in a tone of intense admiration.

"And by the time that the body is discovered we will be in the wilds of the West again, possibly on the very ground to gain which we slay this young fellow, whose only crime consists in being the son of his father."

During this conversation the Westerner had drawn a pair of revolvers, and, with the stealthy tread of the panther, stole through the shadows toward the pair.

He was within fifty feet of them before his presence was discovered, then the man with the harsh voice happened to catch a sight of the dark figure gliding, like a phantom, along the road.

An exclamation of alarm came from his lips.

"Throw up your hands!" cried the Westerner, sternly. "Throw up your hands and surrender! Don't attempt to pull a weapon or I'll kill you on the spot!"

Ordinary men under like circumstances would have surrendered at once, but these two were evidently desperate rascals, for the moment they realized that their plan to murder their victim was frustrated by this unexpected interruption, and their own capture threatened, they made a dash for liberty.

Into the thicket, one man to the right, the other to the left, they went, the movement performed so quickly that the Westerner would have found it a difficult matter to have shot either one of the two, if he had been so disposed.

It was but a single leap from where the men stood to the shelter of the trees, and once within the thicket they ran away at the top of their speed.

Although two to one, yet they did not care to risk a fight; possibly because they feared the report of fire-arms would rouse the neighborhood.

The Westerner advanced to where the student lay, and listened for a few moments to the sound of the men racing away for dear life.

"Build a bridge of silver for a flying enemy," the Spaniards say, and in this case, I might as well let these fellows get away as to pursue them. They have not materially damaged my friend here, and if I went in chase of one of the scoundrels the other might return and settle him."

Having come to this conclusion, the speaker knelt by the side of the student, removed the lasso and raised his head from the ground, supporting it on his knee.

The effects of the fall were rapidly passing away, and soon the young man opened his eyes.

He stared around him for a moment as if striving to understand what had happened, then sat upright and exclaimed:

"By Jove! I did not believe there was anything in your suspicions, but you were right!"

"Yes, there were a pair of scoundrels in waiting for you, and they worked the trick in the Western style by means of a lasso."

"I have read of such things, but I never expected to be a victim of the operation," and the student rose to his feet.



"How do you feel?"

"Not much the worse; a little pain in my head, the result of the sharp crack I got when I was hurled to the earth so unceremoniously. But I do not understand this assault. I know of no reason why any one should wish to injure me!" the young man remarked, earnestly.

"It could hardly be for the purpose of robbery—not if the fellows knew me—for I am not in the habit of carrying more than a few dollars in my pocket."

"It seems to be something of a mystery," the Westerner observed. "But from the brief conversation between the two, which I heard as I was creeping in toward them, I gathered that they bore your father a grudge, and went for you on his account."

"I cannot understand it, for my father has been dead for years. But I have not yet thanked you for the service you rendered me. I feel that I owe you my life, and if the opportunity ever occurs rest assured I will be glad to pay the debt."

The two men clasped hands.

"But, your name?"

"Teton—Thomas Teton."

"You must come with me, so that my mother will have a chance to thank you for the service you have rendered her son."

"I shall be glad to do so."

### CHAPTER III. THE REVELATION.

UP the lonely mountain road the two went. Five minutes' walk brought them to an old-fashioned farm-house, situated on the hilltop; lights gleamed from the windows, and a pair of shepherd dogs came bounding forth with shrill barks.

The moment the young man spoke to the beasts the barks turned into whines of delight, and they frisked and jumped about in huge glee.

The noise made by the dogs attracted the attention of the inmates of the house. The front door opened, and a matronly-looking woman of fifty appeared.

She was still a handsome woman, and had evidently been very beautiful in her youth.

The student gave a cry of surprise upon beholding her, and she echoed it.

"Why, George, this is indeed an unexpected pleasure!" she exclaimed.

"Unexpected!" the young man cried, "why you might have known that I would come as soon as I possibly could after getting your telegram."

"My telegram!" said the lady, in wonder. "I did not send you any message!"

"Is it possible? There is something wrong, then, for I got a message, bearing your signature, bidding me hurry home at once, as you had been seized by a sudden illness and did not expect to live."

"I do not understand it, for I have never been in any better health in my life. But come in; I am glad enough to see you, no matter how it was that you happened to come."

"This is a new-made friend of mine, mother, Mr. Teton, who has done me a great service to-night," the student said, introducing the Westerner, who bowed as the lady addressed him:

"I am glad to see you, sir; any friend of my dear boy is always welcome to his mother's house. But come in, for the night air is chilly."

The young men entered the house and were conducted by the mother to the sitting-room, a large, comfortable-looking apartment to the right of the doorway.

There was a huge, old-fashioned fire-place, wherein a log fire blazed.

Mrs. Haven saw her visitors comfortably seated and then she expressed her wonder at the false dispatch.

"Mother, it was a trick to lure me to my death!" the son said, and then he explained all that had taken place, ending with the declaration: "Had it not been for this gentleman, in all probability I never should have looked upon your face again."

"Oh, sir, it was the hand of Heaven which guided you to the spot!" the grateful mother exclaimed.

"It really seems so," the Westerner remarked, "for it was a strange combination of circumstances which brought me into this neighborhood. I have just returned from a foreign trip, having been away from my native land for nearly twelve years. My home is in Montana."

Mrs. Haven gave a violent start and fixed her eyes anxiously upon the face of the speaker.

"Montana!" she exclaimed, "yes, and your face seems familiar to me! I felt sure I had seen you before, the moment I saw you, and yet I cannot remember where."

"I do not think we have ever met, madam," the stranger replied. "I have a most excellent memory for faces and seldom forget any that I have ever seen."

"Way, mother, were you ever in Montana?" exclaimed the son in astonishment.

"Yes, I was married there," the lady replied, with a deep sigh. "But I had forgotten how time flies. It is now nearly eighteen years since I left Montana, and, of course, I could not have

met you there, for, sir," and she bowed with stately dignity to the Westerner, "you would have been only a boy at the time. Still, there is something about your face so strangely familiar that I am sure I must have been acquainted with some of your relatives—your father, perhaps?"

"Yes, that is probable," and there was a peculiar expression in the dark eyes of the Westerner as he uttered the simple remark.

"Yes, sir, I can thank you for my son's life!" the old lady exclaimed, gratefully, to the Westerner.

"I but did my duty, madam," was the reply. "Is it not a strange, mysterious affair?" the young man exclaimed.

"Well, I think I can, in part, explain the mystery," the old lady remarked with a sudden air of resolution. "There is a painful secret connected with our family, my boy, which I have never revealed to you. I do not hesitate to speak before you, sir, and intrust you with this secret, for I feel as if you are a true friend to my son."

"I can assure you, madam, that you can depend upon my discretion," the Westerner hastened to declare.

"Twenty-two years ago your father, George, and I were married. I was on a pleasure-trip through the West, met your father at Fort Benton on the Upper Missouri, and as I was an orphan, of age, and my own mistress, there were no obstacles to my wedding the man I fancied. Your father was the Indian Agent in charge of the Crows. Two years after my marriage—you were then about a year old—a desperate attempt was made to ruin him. Charges were promulgated at Washington against him; he was accused of all sorts of corruption. It was the work of a few men who were envious of a rich mining strike that your father had made on a little stream known as Prickly Pear Creek, and a town called Bearfoot Bar sprung up there.

"By means of this foul conspiracy they hoped to convict your father of having cheated the Government, have him imprisoned, then they would seize the mining property."

"Your father had provided a home for me at Fort Benton, and when he learned the nature of the conspiracy he came in haste to me. I was to go to Washington and ask the aid of some influential friends, while he organized a force to protect the mining property."

"I went, taking you with me, but, to my dismay, discovered that the conspiracy had been so adroitly planned that there seemed to be no chance for your father to prove his innocence."

"To add to my despair a letter came from him, in which he said he was on the eve of a bloody battle for the possession of the mines, and the chances were that he would be beaten in the fight, possibly killed, and the ruffians who opposed him had boasted that if they triumphed in the fight they would hunt me out in the East and kill both me and my boy, so that no one should dispute their right to the property, therefore he urged me to take a false name and conceal myself."

"I had property of my own sufficient to amply support me, so I would be above the reach of want. I obeyed my husband's injunctions. This property belonged to a cousin and I purchased it, for I did not believe my husband's enemies would ever discover me in this secluded retreat."

"Anxiously I perused the newspapers, seeking intelligence of my husband, and at last news came; there had been a battle, my husband, who was represented as having been entirely in the wrong, was beaten in the fight, and was supposed to have wandered away and died of his wounds."

Here the old lady paused for a moment to wipe away the tears which these melancholy recollections had caused to flow.

"As soon as I recovered from the shock," she continued, "I sent a detective to Montana for the purpose of discovering my husband's fate, but his quest was a fruitless one; my husband had disappeared, and no one knew whether he was alive or dead. It was the general impression, though, that he had died of the wounds received in the fight, although his body was never discovered. I have always cherished the hope that he might be alive; still, it is hoping against hope, for if he was alive, during the twenty years that have elapsed, I surely would have heard something from him."

And again the tears flowed from the afflicted woman's eyes.

"Do not weep, mother," the student said, approaching her chair, kneeling, and putting his arm tenderly around her waist. "If my father is dead tears cannot recall him. If he is alive, I will find him. If he was murdered by these scoundrels I will avenge his death and recover the property which was wrested from him!"

A look of pride came into the eyes of the mother as she listened to the noble words.

"But you are all I have in the world," she murmured. "The fight is such an unequal one, too."

"No, for I have right and justice on my side!" the student cried. "These scoundrels by this attack on me have commenced the war. Now,

I will disguise myself and transfer the fight to the wilds of the far West; amid the hills of Montana the scene of battle will be!"

"Let him go, madam; he is not his father's son if he does not burn to avenge that father's wrongs!" the Westerner exclaimed. "And if he cares to avail himself of my assistance I shall be glad to give it. I have an account to settle with the man who wrote the letter, and who, I believe, is one of the chief conspirators. He is not acquainted with me, and so my appearance in the mining-camp will not alarm him, and your son can easily disguise himself so that he will not be recognized."

At last the mother consented.

"Go, then, and Heaven will protect you, I am sure!" she exclaimed. "And now for the first time I will tell you your right name. It is George Haven Randal Crawford. Your father was Colonel Randal Crawford, once of the regular army, but who resigned to take the Indian agency which wrought his ruin."

Again the peculiar light shone in the eyes of the Westerner. His guess in regard to the identity of the young man was correct.

"I will redeem my father's name and bring to the bar of justice the villains who conspired to ruin him!" the student declared.

And deep down in the soul of the dark-faced Westerner a similar vow was registered.

### CHAPTER IV. THE MINING-CAMP.

BEARFOOT BAR, on Prickly Pear Creek, in the eastern foot-hills of the old Rocky Mountains—as flourishing a mining-camp as can be found in Montana, for, in addition to the regular mining works, there were plenty of chances for individual miners in the neighboring hills and gulches, so that a man could average four or five dollars a day and not have to work hard either.

And then an United States post, Fort Fremont, was located a mile down the creek, garrisoned by two companies of regulars, nominally two hundred men; actually about a hundred, and this helped to make the camp a busy town.

The leading place of resort in the town was the Golden Star Hotel, kept by a long-legged "pike" from Missouri, universally called by all Long Pete Logan. It was hotel, restaurant, bar-room and gaming saloon all in one, after the fashion of the West.

On the night when we introduce Bearfoot Bar and its inhabitants, the main room of the saloon was well filled with people. Some eating, some drinking, a few gambling, but the majority were gathered in little groups discussing the news of the day; the most of them were in the neighborhood of the cigar stand, which was quite an elaborate affair, presided over by a good-looking young woman, who would have been decidedly handsome but for her strong masculine appearance.

But for all this, she was one of the belles of the camp.

Cherry Labarge she was called, and from her dark complexion it was believed she had Indian blood in her veins, but this the girl always indignantly denied, seeming to consider that it was somewhat of a disgrace to admit she was akin to the red-men.

In a small room, just back of the cigar-stand, entrance to which could only be had by going behind the stand, sat three men.

This room was reserved for privileged characters, and this trio were three of the most prominent men in the camp.

One was a big, burly man, well in years, with a long brown beard, thickly streaked with gray, as was also his hair, which was of the same hue.

This was Archibald Crawford, Mayor of Bearfoot Bar, and President of the Black Snake Mining Company, the principal concern in the town; the second was a muscular, broad-shouldered fellow, also well in years, with a dark, forbidding-looking face, his complexion bronzed to a hue almost as dark as that of an Indian, the face rendered still more stern and repulsive by the fierce, short black beard which covered all the lower portion of it. His dress was an odd compound of the costume worn by the miners and the mountain-men, as the trappers, guides and Indian-fighters are called.

This was Black Bill Ricolls, one of the old-timers, who boasted that he knew every foot of the country from the Yellowstone to the upper branches of the Missouri.

The third man of the three, was a short, thick-set Irishman, with a face so Celtic in its appearance that no one would ever make the mistake of thinking he was anything but a son of the Emerald Isle.

He was called Barnard Finnegan, and was both a lawyer and doctor, but his red face betrayed that he was a slave to dissipation, and his general appearance was far from pleasing.

Crawford had just entered the room and taken a seat when we introduce the three to the notice of our readers.

"You sent for me, Barney?" the mayor said. "Yes, on a matter of particular business, do ye mird," the Irishman replied, speaking with a slight brogue.

"I'm here—what is it?"



"Shure, talkin' is dhry wourk, Mister Mayor," suggested Finnegan, with a nod toward the bar, which could be seen through the open door.

"You are always ready for a drink!" Black Bill exclaimed. "You have got the biggest swaller of any Irishman I ever struck."

"I was born thirsty!" replied the lawyer with a wink.

"Tell Cherry to bring us a pint-flask of whisky," said the mayor to the old mountain-man.

"Oh, shure, Archy dear, a pint is a weeney sup for three of us!" Finnegan exclaimed as Black Bill rose to execute the order.

"Quite enough to wet our whistles," Crawford replied.

Black Bill spoke to the girl and she dispatched the boy, who assisted her at the cigar-stand, for the liquor.

After it had arrived and been duly sampled, the lawyer drew the attention of his companions to two men standing in one of the groups, a little way from the cigar-stand.

Two young fellows, dressed in the usual frontier fashion, both well-bronzed, and muscularly-built.

"They are strangers," the mayor said, after taking a good look at them.

"Yis, they arrived in the camp yisterday," the Irishman remarked.

"What of them?"

"Have ye taken a good look at the taller wan of the two? If not, be afther doing it and tell me where ye have seen a face like his before?"

Thus advised, the mayor, and the old mountain-man, carefully surveyed the man indicated, and as they did so a dark look came over their faces.

"Aha! maybe ye are afther smelling a rat!" the Irishman exclaimed.

"Well, I don't think that I ever saw this fellow before, but I most certainly have been well acquainted with some one whom he strongly resembles," the mayor remarked with a puzzled air.

"Yes, that is just the way it strikes me," Black Bill observed. "I hain't never seen this galoot as I knows on, but I have seen a cuss w'ot looks wonderfully like him."

"Go back wid ye twenty odd years, wash the coloring that this bucko has put on his face, change his black hair for light yellow, and who will he look like?" the Irishman asked.

"Randal Crawford!" said the mayor in a tone a little above a whisper.

"That is the man," Black Bill added.

"Now yez have hit it; and who is this man who bears such a resemblance to dead Randal Crawford?" Finnegan asked.

"His son from the East, I suppose," the mayor replied, with a peculiar glance at Black Bill, which that worthy returned.

"Yis, exactly; there was a son, ye know, and at the time the ruction took place the wife went East and took the boy with her."

"I remember," the mayor observed, thoughtfully.

"But I say, this man looks like a regular Westerner," Black Bill remarked. "The other one 'pears more like an Eastern chap."

"That is where the cunnin' of the deluder comes in!" the lawyer exclaimed. "And that, too, to my thinking, shows that he is a mighty dangerous customer. It is not many young min of his age that would be afther having the ability to assume a disguise."

"Well, what difference does it make to us whether he is Randal Crawford's son or not?" the mayor asked, with an assumption of carelessness.

"Oh, no difference at all, at all, of coorse," the lawyer replied, also assuming a careless air. "I only thought you would like to know about it, particularly as he has been afther asking some impudent questions in regard to the mining property which Colonel Randal Crawford held in this town twenty odd years ago."

"Oh, he has been asking questions, eh?" exclaimed Crawford, with an ominous scowl.

"Yis, he has been trying to pump the landlord."

"Well, I reckon he didn't get much information out of Long Pete, for he is our man and knows enough to keep his tongue between his teeth," the mayor observed.

"Oh, yis, Pete is a sly one, and he never was afther letting on, ye know, that he thought the spalpeen was pumping him, but he twisted the conversation round so as to try and find out why the man was curious about the early history of the camp."

"What questions did he put?" the mayor asked.

"He invited the landlord, and his pard, to take a dhrink wid him—he calls himself Teton Tom, by the way, and his pard is named Harry Burke—then he remarked that this was a foine camp, and his pard asked—it was all cut and dried, ye see—if this wasn't the spot where a man named Randal Crawford made such a big strike twenty odd years ago."

"Ah, yes, I see; and I suppose Long Pete never heard of such a man?" the mayor observed.

"You l'ave Long Pete alone! He was that

innocent that butter wouldn't melt in his mouth!" the Irishman declared, with a chuckle.

"He allowed that he had been here for going on twenty years, but had never heard of such a man—was he a relation of yours, mayor? he axed, but neither of the pair knew anything about that. All they knew was that they had heard somewhere that a man named Randal Crawford once made a big strike here."

"Oh, yes, that is a likely story!" the mayor exclaimed, in contempt. "Randal Crawford disappeared twenty years ago—died, probably, though no one ever knew for certain—and it is safe to say that, outside of a certain circle of men, there are not five in the town who ever heard of him, and hardly one of the five would be apt to remember that the strike that Randal Crawford made is now known as the Black Snake Mine, one of the richest properties in Montana."

"True for yez!" Finnegan exclaimed. "But in all cases of this kind there is always some meddler by for to be afther putting his oar in, and one of the smart Alecks of the camp advised this Teton Tom to find Dumb Dickey, that idiot, you know, saying he, maybe, could tell him, as the natural was an old-timer, and well-acquainted with the history of all these mining-camps in the upper Missouri region."

"That Dumb Dickey is a drunken fraud, and he ought to be kicked out of every decent camp!" the mayor declared.

"I reckon he is pretty well-posted, though," Black Bill remarked.

"Oh, I don't think so, and to my thinking he is more knave than fool; he is always sneaking around trying to overhear what he can, and that is the way he manages to surprise these ignorant miners sometimes when he tells their fortunes," Crawford declared.

"Wa-al, if the durned fool knows w'ot is good for him he will keep his spoon out of our soup!" Black Bill declared.

"I reckon, Bill, you had better give the idiot a gentle hint that we think his room is better than his company in this camp, and that if he is wise he will take himself off."

"All right, I will attend to him the first time I run across the p'ison galoot!" the old mountain-man declared.

"And now about this Teton Tom?" the lawyer asked. "He m'anes mischief, and that he is a dangerous man, too, I will go bail! It is my thinking that if yez are wise, Mister Crawford, ye will cut his claws afore he has a chance to use them."

The mayor took another look at the dark, muscular, handsome stranger, who by his bearing so strongly reminded one of a panther; in his mind again he traced the resemblance to the Randal Crawford, the founder of Bearfoot Bar, and a peculiar vague feeling of dread stole into his heart.

"You are right, Finnegan, right for a thousand dollars!" he exclaimed. "This man is likely to prove dangerous, and it is my rule in a fight to always get in the first blow, so, Bill, you had better attend to him. Arrange the matter, you know, so that no one will suspect that there is anything in it but a common row."

"Oh, that is all right; I will do the thing up in style. I noticed that the fellow was chinning with Cherry a while ago, and I will get her to put up the job."

"Going to allow her to know what the game is?" the mayor asked, and from his tone it was plain he doubted the advisability of it.

"Oh, no; I told the Chinaman that I would come up for some cigars to-night, but I will send her instead."

The cigar-stand was Black Bill's property.

"And you will suggest to Cherry to get this Teton Tom to escort her?" Crawford said.

"That is the programme, jest to make the other fellers jealous, and so encourage trade!" Black Bill remarked, with a grin.

"That scheme will work all right, the girl will not be apt to have any suspicions, and if on the way the pair are met, and there is a row, it is an accident, of coorse."

"You bet!" Black Bill declared.

"Well, go ahead, pick good men, for this fellow seems as if he was a fighter, although I suppose you intend to take him by surprise," the mayor observed.

"That is the game! I don't reckon to give him much chance to show what he can do," and then Black Bill sauntered out into the saloon.

The others watched him speak to a pair of rough-looking fellows, and after a brief conversation, the two left the saloon.

Then Black Bill went up to the bar and chatted with the landlord for about ten minutes, after this he came over to the cigar stand.

"Cherry, I wish you would go up to Charlee Lee's and get the cigars he war to have ready to-night. Jimmy will look out for the stand, and if you like, you kin take that new beau of yours along with you, that Injun-like feller yonder. It would be a good idea, for that would kinder stir the other galoots up a leetle."

"All right; I don't doubt he will be glad of the chance," the girl replied.

"He ain't no white man if he isn't!" Black

Bill declared, and then he returned to the inner room again.

The girl waited until she caught the eyes of the handsome stranger, then nodded to him to approach.

"I am going up to the Chinaman to get some cigars," she said, with a coquettish glance. "It is a little way up the gulch, and I shouldn't mind having some nice young man for an escort."

"I shall be delighted to offer my services!" Teton Tom replied, immediately. "It is a delightful night for a stroll, for the moon is so bright that it is almost as light as by day."

"If you will wait outside to the west of the hotel I will be out in a moment. It would not do for us to go out together, for that would make all the rest jealous, and then they might go somewhere else for their cigars, and as I get a commission on all I sell, I cannot afford to drive away customers."

"Certainly not! I will wait for you."

Then Teton Tom returned to his companion, exchanged a few words with him, then quitted the saloon.

As he had said, the round full moon rode high in the heavens, and it was a beautiful night.

Teton Tom walked slowly up the street until he got beyond the hotel, then halted.

He had not long to wait, for the girl soon made her appearance, having donned a coquettish-looking felt hat of the Alpine style.

Teton Tom offered his arm, and the two started up the gulch.

There were only some eight or ten houses above the hotel, so it did not take the pair long to get out of the confines of the town, and free from the gaping scrutiny of the loungers.

"What is your name?" the girl asked, abruptly.

"Thomas Teton, but I am generally termed Teton Tom."

"You are a half-breed?"

"I suppose so, but there is a little mystery about that. I am not quite certain who I am."

"I love men with mysteries."

"I hope you will love me then!" the young fellow replied, with a laugh.

"I am going to love you enough to do you a service which may cost me dearly," the girl observed, hurriedly, as two men made their appearance in the trail a couple of hundred feet away.

"Is that true?"

"It is. I am a decoy to lure you to your death, Teton Tom!" the girl exclaimed.

## CHAPTER V.

### A QUARREL.

"I OUGHT to be astonished, I know," the young man said, "but I am not, for I expected as much."

"Judge me not too harshly!" she implored.

"I am in the power of a merciless tyrant who forces me to do his will. If I should dare to disobey I should be sent back to dwell amid the savages from whom he took me years ago—to be the squaw there of some brawny red butcher, and that is a fate which I dread worse than death."

"I can understand the feeling; I am sorry for you, and if it is in my power to aid you I will gladly do so."

"Alas! you will need all your courage and strength to protect yourself!" the girl replied.

"I am sure these ruffians coming, who are two of the worst men in the camp, mean mischief. I felt that I was being used as a lure to lead you into danger when I was instructed to ask you to be my escort, but I did not know the nature of the plot, and I did not dare to refuse. Do not ask me to tell you who instructed me, for I cannot."

"I am not at all curious. I shall discover who my enemies are soon enough," Teton Tom replied, with a cool confidence which amazed the girl. "But, as I told you, I suspected I was being led into a trap, but I came willingly enough, for I want to let some men in this camp see what kind of a fellow I am, and the quicker I give them a taste of my quality the better."

"You are brave to rashness!" the girl exclaimed in admiration. "Heaven grant that you may prove the victor in the fight!"

By this time the two men were so near that the pair were forced to stop conversing, and as the fellows came up, one exclaimed, in a loud and extremely offensive tone:

"Hello, if hyer ain't my lovely tulip, Cherry, hooking onto the arm of a strange galoot! Say, you mud-colored son of a sea-cook, drop that gal and git, or I'll let daylight right through yer!"

The two had approached within a yard or so of the pair and stood directly in the way, so it was impossible for them to go on.

"Out of the way, you insolent hound!" cried Teton Tom with an outburst of fierceness which greatly astonished the hearers.

"W'ot's that?" cried the desperado, immediately reaching for a weapon.

But quick as he was, Teton Tom was quicker still.



Before the ruffian could get out his pistol the dark-faced stranger, with the quickness of a panther and the strength of a lion, dealt him a terrific blow, which landed full on the "Adam's apple" in his throat.

The man threw up his hands, staggered back, and dropped as if he had been shot.

This gave the other one an opportunity to get out his pistol, but before he could cock it, Teton Tom turned on him and with a dextrous kick sent it flying out of his hands, then, springing forward, he smashed the desperado between the eyes, felling him like a log to the ground.

The affair only lasted a second, and never since Bearfoot Bar existed had two men been so completely knocked, and with so little trouble.

Of course two such hard-headed customers as the desperadoes were not long in recovering their wits.

They staggered to their feet, pulling out their pistols as they did so, but only to find themselves "covered" by a pair of revolvers, the hammers raised, ready for action, in the hands of the stranger.

"Go slow!" Teton Tom warned; "don't attempt to cock those pistols or you are a pair of dead men."

At a single glance the desperadoes saw that they were in a tight place, their adversary had "the drop" on them in the worst kind of way.

For a moment they glared in impotent rage at Teton Tom, and then the man who had begun the trouble, cried out:

"You durned red nigger! you don't dar' to give me any chance, for my white alley! I'm Diamond Joe, I am, the worst man in this hyer camp, and if you give me any sort of show I will fix you ready for planting in no time!"

"That is the rifle I am onto, too, you bet!" the second desperado declared. "My name is Crooked Smith, and I reckon thar ain't many men in this hyer camp who won't turn white when they hear that I am a-gunnin' arter them. Jest you give me a show, and I will put you whar the dogs won't bite ye!"

"You are a pair of villainous cut-throats!" Teton Tom declared. "But I reckon that after I get through with you, neither one of you will be worth much! Just walk along, Miss Cherry, and wait for me at the rise of the hill while I attend to these two blowhards!"

The girl complied with the request without a word, but no sooner had she got well out of range when two new-comers appeared upon the scene—a lady and gentleman, mounted on horseback, rode up and gazed with astonishment at the strange sight.

The lady was a handsome blonde-haired girl of two and twenty, a dashing creature whose appearance would attract attention even in a ball-room, crowded with beauties.

This was Katherine Cadwalader, daughter of the old army veteran, Major Roland Cadwalader, in command of Fort Fremont.

Her companion was a rather dudish-looking officer, one Captain Jefferson Morgan, attached to the garrison.

This unexpected arrival caused a hitch in the proceedings.

"Two against one!" cried Katherine, with a flash of indignation, as she gazed upon Teton Tom; "that is not fair play, and cannot be permitted!"

"Oh, it doesn't matter," Teton Tom replied, with a respectful bow, as the lady reined in her horse at his side. "You cannot call such scalawags as these rascals men, you know. They rank with Digger Injuns and such like vermin. I reckon I could whip about a dozen chaps like these fellows and not have my hands very full either."

The boast brought forth cries of rage from the two desperadoes.

"You can't do it, nohow!" Diamond Joe cried. "You took an unfair advantage of me and hit me a lick in the throat afore I was ready for you, but I am up and ready for business now; gi'n me a chance in a fair fight and I will salivate you!"

"That is the talk!" exclaimed his companion. "We are big chiefs, we air, both on us, and all we ax is a show for our money. I reckon you have spoiled my good looks for one while with that smash in the face that you gi'n me, and I am jest hungering for a chance to git square!"

This was the truth; Crooked Smith could not be called a handsome man when at his best, but now that he was disfigured with a pair of ferocious "black eyes," he was about as ugly a customer as could be found in the town.

"Yes, but you are two to one, and that is not fair play!" the girl persisted, her eyes dwelling with interest upon the handsome face of the dark stranger.

"Oh, that is all right; if they are satisfied I am," Teton Tom replied, with an air full of confidence.

The young officer, who was Katherine Cadwalader's most persistent suitor, was not pleased with the interest that the young girl evidently took in the dark-faced stranger, and he thought it wise to speak at this point.

To his notion, Teton Tom was an arrant boaster, and he did not believe he stood any chance of whipping the pair if he was compelled to fight both of them.

"If this man believes he is more than a match for the two, I do not see why there should be any objection to the fight," he remarked. "If he gets the worst of the battle, it will be a lesson to him not to be so confident the next time," and there was a perceptible sneer in his tone.

"That is it exactly!" Teton Tom exclaimed. "Perhaps I need a lesson, and perhaps these scoundrels can give me one, but I doubt it!"

"Oh, jest gi'n us the chance!" Diamond Joe roared.

"Yes, that is the talk!" cried his companion. "Give us the chance and see how we will jump at it!"

"I am very much obliged to you, miss," Teton Tom said, "for your wish that I may have fair play, but I am satisfied to let the fight go on. I am a stranger in this camp, and the quicker people find out what kind of a man I am the better. Now then, if you two mean business, turn and walk up the trail for a hundred feet or so, then right-about face, and come at me as soon as you like."

"That's the cheese!" cried Diamond Joe.

"You bet!" yelled the other.

And the pair at once proceeded to execute the maneuver.

"It is a shame for all that!" the girl declared. "But I suppose a willful man must have his own way; you have my best wishes, though, for your success in this unequal fight."

"Thank you!" responded the adventurer, with a grateful bow.

Then Miss Cadwalader and the captain rode off to the right, halting when they were well out of range, and facing their steeds about so as to witness the fight.

Katherine Cadwalader was a soldier's daughter, had followed the flag with her father ever since she was a little girl, and so did not shrink from witnessing the shock of arms.

The desperadoes went fully a hundred feet before they turned, examining their weapons as they marched along.

"I say, Diamond, this galoot thinks he is a fighter, whether he is or not," Crooked Smith observed.

"Yes, he is plucky enuff, but we will skin him when we git arter him."

"He is a good man with his fists," Crooked Smith observed, reflectively. "Darn me if I ever got a worse lick in my life! If he is as good with his we'pons as he is with his fists, we won't have no picnic!"

"Wa-al, if we two can't do him up, we ought to be bootied out of the town!" Diamond Joe exclaimed, evidently more confident than his companion.

"Yes, we ought to do the trick, but how will we come at him?"

"Not together, for that would give him too big a show. When we turn, you skirmish off fifty feet or so to the right; then we'll bear down on him, and the odds are big we kin lay him out!"

"We are to get fifty ducats apiece for this rifle?" Crooked Smith said.

"That was the figure."

"Tain't enuff, pard! This is an extra good man, and it is worth a hundred."

"Right you ar! We will strike Black Bill for fifty extra arter we lay him out."

"Ef he don't lay us out," observed Crooked Smith, evidently a little doubtful in his mind.

By this time the hundred feet were covered and the two turned.

"Now be off with you!" Diamond Joe, exclaimed. "By getting at him this way the odds are big that we will bother the cuss."

Away to the right some thirty paces Crooked Smith went.

Diamond Joe waited until his pard was in position, and then gave the signal to advance.

Motionless as a statue, his dark figure outlined against the sky, a revolver in each hand, Teton Tom waited for the approach of his foes.

The pair had determined to reserve their fire until well within range, but when they got to a point some sixty feet from the adventurer up like a flash came both of his hands, and the leveled revolvers caused the pair to halt and take aim.

They had jumped to the conclusion that the stranger was one of those seldom seen men who could shoot as well with the left hand as with the right.

Hardly had Teton Tom's revolvers reached the level than one of them was discharged; it was the pistol which covered Diamond Joe, and by a second or two he anticipated the desperado's shot, for Joe was one of the marksmen who liked to dwell on his aim.

To use his own expression, he thought he had a "dead sure bead" on the young man, and being a fair revolver-shot the odds are great that he would have succeeded in hitting his man had not the discharge of Teton Tom's pistol interfered with his aim.

The adventurer had designed to hit the desperado in the breast, a little below the line of the shoulder, but a movement on the part of the human target interfered with this, and the ball, tearing its way along Diamond Joe's right arm, entered the shoulder.

The revolver dropped from his hand, dis-

charged, but with the aim destroyed, just as Teton Tom's bullet cut into the flesh.

A yell of pain came from the stricken man, and with his left hand he essayed to draw his other revolver, but the effort was too much for him, and with another groan he sunk to the ground.

Crooked Smith had banged away as soon as Teton Tom fired, but the fellow was a poor shot, and the bullet cut the air a yard over the head of the man at whom it was aimed.

Then with his left hand, Teton Tom returned the fire, but the desperado anticipated the shot, and dodged just as it was discharged.

The device saved him from a severe wound, for Teton Tom was a dead-shot with both hands, but the bullet cut away the lobe of Crooked Smith's left ear.

With a yell of pain the desperado clapped his hand to his ear and then fled, believing himself to be much more severely wounded than he really was.

The fight was ended, and Teton Tom had won an easy victory.

The sound of the firing attracted the attention of the loungers in the camp and they began to hurry to the scene of action.

Miss Cadwalader and the captain rode off, and Teton Tom joined Cherry at the top of the hill.

When the miners reached the spot Diamond Joe had recovered sufficiently to tell the story of the fight, and the miners bore him to the camp. The mayor was immediately summoned. Great was the wonder which existed; the Bar was in a fever of excitement.

## CHAPTER VI.

### A WARM RECEPTION.

TETON TOM went on with the girl as placidly as if encounters of this kind were every-day occurrences.

"You are well-fitted to hold your own, I see!" the girl exclaimed. "You have whipped two of the worst desperadoes in the camp."

"One of them turned and ran away fast enough, though, when he felt the sting of my bullet," the adventurer remarked.

"Yes, the downfall of his companion evidently cowed him."

"That is usually the way with nine out of every ten of these desperadoes. Let them be confronted boldly and they weaken. Well, I am much obliged to you for the caution you gave me, and can you still further oblige me with the reason why this attack was made upon me?"

"No, I cannot; I am as much in the dark as yourself in regard to that. Can you not guess? Have you not enemies in the camp who fear you?"

"I don't know a soul in the town. I never was within a hundred miles of it before," Teton Tom answered. "There is no reason, as far as I know, why any one here or elsewhere should wish to injure me."

"It is a mystery, then," the girl remarked, thoughtfully. "But you can rest assured that there is some good reason for it or the attack would not have been made."

"I presume these fellows are but hired tools?"

"Yes, and I must caution you that because you have baffled this first attack, you must not think you are out of danger, for the men who are at the bottom of the plot will not stop because the first attempt failed."

"I suspected as much; and now will you frankly let me ask why you took the trouble to warn me—why you did not let me go blindly on?"

"And I will answer as frankly by saying that I do not know," the girl replied. "It was a sudden impulse which came to me, and I obeyed it. I will say more: if I should learn that you were threatened with any danger, and I could save you from it even at the risk of personal suffering, I would gladly do it, and I cannot tell you why, either."

"It is a case of liking at first sight, eh?" Teton Tom exclaimed. "Well, I must say that I appreciate it, and if at any time you need a friend, I will do my best to be one to you!"

"Thanks!"

The girl extended her hand, and the young man clasped it warmly.

"There, we are comrades now, pledged to help each other!" he exclaimed. "By the way, did you see the lady and officer on horseback who rode up and witnessed the fight?"

"Yes," and then Cherry explained who they were.

"She was evidently much interested in you," Cherry added, with a touch of mischief. "There's a sweetheart for you!"

"Oh, no, she wouldn't care for a man like myself; besides, I would prefer a girl like you."

"Nonsense! Nobody wants me with my bold face and masculine ways. I am more like a man than a woman!"

"You wrong yourself; you are as attractive a girl as I have seen for many a day."

"Yes, that is what Dumb Dickey says, and he always predicts a rich husband for me when I go to have my fortune told."

"Ah, that reminds me: he is a party that I



want to see; who is he, and where can I find him?"

"He lives in a cave up the gulch, and you can generally find him there, if he isn't out on a begging trip. He is a harmless old man who is out of his mind, and believes he can tell fortunes, and he reads the future after the fashion of the Indian medicine-men; the people of the camp humor his notions and get him to tell their fortunes so they can have an excuse to give him something to keep body and soul together."

"But why do they call him dumb if he can speak?"

"Because he never speaks if he can help himself, excepting when he is called upon to tell fortunes."

"Yes, yes, I see."

"Here is my destination, Charlee Lee's, the John who makes cigars; excellent ones, too, better than those we get from Helena," and the girl paused in front of a rude cabin. "He came here to start a laundry, but nearly starved to death, for b'iled shirts are at a discount in this region; finally he got into this cigar-making, and now he is getting along nicely."

The cigars were procured and the two returned to the camp.

Teton Tom was the observed of all the observers as he entered the hotel, for the news of the fight had spread like wild-fire and all were anxious to see the unknown stranger who had so easily whipped two of the best men the camp could boast.

Cherry returned to her place behind the cigar stand, but was at once summoned into the little room still occupied by the mayor, Black Bill and the Irish lawyer.

Eagerly she was questioned in regard to the trouble, and she related the particulars of the affair.

"Be the powers! this spalpeen is a lively divil!" the Irishman exclaimed.

"Oh, Joe and Smith evidently thought they had a soft thing," Black Bill remarked. "They were too confident, and so let this Teton Tom get the best of them."

"Oh, no; they did the best they could!" the girl asserted. "The stranger was too much for them."

"Diamond Joe swears that this fellow took an unfair advantage of him, and some of his friends are trying to get the marshal to arrest this Teton Tom on the ground that he tried to assassinate Joe," the mayor remarked, with a peculiar glance at the girl, as much as to ask how far she would go in swearing to the truth of the statement.

The girl understood what the mayor was driving at in a moment.

"Well, Joe is a friend of mine, and I would do anything in my power to help him get square with this man who has wounded him so badly," she said, endeavoring to appear as truthful as possible. "But it would not be of the least use for Joe's friends to try any game of that kind, for it cannot be worked. If it depended upon my testimony it might be done, but there were two more people who witnessed the fight, Miss Cadwalader and Captain Morgan, and they will bear witness, of course, that this stranger met the two and whipped them both single-handed in the fairest kind of a fight."

"Ahem! yes, under the circumstances there would not be any use of your attempting to tell a different story," the mayor remarked.

"That is what I thought," Cherry replied, innocently.

"I reckon, Bill, you had better see the marshal and tell him to advise the boys to go slow, for he cannot haul a man up for acting in self-defense."

"All right; I will attend to it," Black Bill replied.

"That is all, Cherry; I only wanted to get at the truth of the matter," Crawford said.

The girl nodded and returned to her stand.

"It is as I suspected when I saw the three in there together," she murmured. "The mayor is at the bottom of the plot; but why should he bear hatred to this stranger? That is a mystery which I must set my wits at work to discover, and I will do it, too, before I am many weeks older!"

"Some other game will have to be worked," the mayor remarked, after the girl departed.

"Yis, wid the ividence of Miss Cadwalader and the captain ag'in' us, we would niver be able to convince a jury that this fellow was afther trying to murder Diamond Joe," the Irishman declared.

"If the men on the jury knew enough to go in when it rains they would be a mighty sight more apt to think that Diamond Joe and Crooked Smith set out to murder this strange galoot!" Black Bill declared.

"That is true enough," the mayor agreed, "but I have a little scheme in my head which I think will work. From the display that this fellow has made, it seems to me that he is likely to prove an extremely troublesome customer, and I am now thoroughly convinced that if we do not settle him as speedily as possible, we are likely to find ourselves with a big job on our hands."

The others agreed that this was not an unreasonable view.

"Send Long Pete in to me," Crawford said. "I want to get a few particulars from him, and then I will explain the scheme which I have in my mind."

Black Bill obeyed the command, and in a few minutes the landlord was busy in consultation with the others.

Meanwhile Teton Tom was holding a regular levee in the saloon, the citizens insisting upon making a hero of him in spite of himself.

There were many honest miners present who had been abused by the desperadoes, and they were delighted that a new "chief" had arisen.

After this signal defeat neither Diamond Joe or Crooked Smith could hope to lord it over the camp again.

As soon as possible, Teton Tom and his pard, Harry Burke, got away from the crowd and retired to their room.

So friendly were the miners, though, that it was after eleven before the pair got up-stairs.

It was the general opinion that such a man as Teton Tom had proved himself to be ought to be offered inducement sufficient to make him locate in the town, and at least a dozen had proffered him a share in their claims, and the most of them had said, in the most generous manner, that if he did not happen to be well-heeled, financially speaking, it did not make any difference.

It was the man they wanted, not his money, and they were willing to agree to any fair arrangement. He could have all the time he wanted to pay.

Teton Tom thanked the citizens for these generous offers, expressed his pleasure at being thus warmly received, and said that as soon as he had time to look around, he would accept some one of the liberal offers, for it was his intention to settle down in Bearfoot Bar, for a while, at least.

Up-stairs, in the solitude of their apartment, the pards fell to discussing the situation.

Their room was on the second floor—there were but two stories to the building—the lower one being occupied by the saloon, while the upper was divided into small sleeping apartments.

The furniture was of the rudest kind, and only consisted of a cot bedstead with a hay mattress and a couple of stools. In lieu of a table a shelf was affixed to the wall, and upon this Teton Tom had placed the candle which the host provided for his lodgers.

As the reader has undoubtedly guessed, Teton Tom and his pard, Harry Burke, were the two young men whose acquaintance the reader made in the first chapter of our story.

George Crawford had so completely disguised himself that his most intimate friend would not have recognized him, but Teton Tom had made no change in his appearance except to don a costume mainly composed of buckskin, suited to the Montana wilds.

## CHAPTER VII.

### IN THE NIGHT.

AFTER placing the candle upon the shelf, Teton Tom seated himself upon one of the stools, while Burke, as we shall call young Crawford while masquerading in his disguise, helped himself to the other.

The stools were by the single window which the room contained, and as the apartment was in the front of the hotel the pards had a good view of the main street—in fact the only one—of Bearfoot Bar.

The moon was still high up in the heavens and flooded the room with its silver light.

"We do not need the candle," Teton Tom remarked. "The moon affords ample light, and I will put the candle out. I want to hold a consultation with you, and if we put out the light, in case any one is prowling about the entry they will come to the conclusion that we have gone to bed."

"That is true."

Then Teton Tom extinguished the candle.

When he resumed his seat Burke remarked:

"Well, our first day in Bearfoot Bar will be apt to be remembered as a remarkable one."

"Yes; I expected we would have trouble before we got through the camp, but I did not think it would come quite so quick."

"I gathered from what you said when you came in that you think those two fellows intended to kill you?"

"Yes, that was the game; they would have laid me out if they could. They pretended to take offense at seeing me with the girl, but that was only an excuse to pick a quarrel with me."

"What does it mean?"

"Why, that our mission to this camp is suspected, and it puzzles me, too, because the blow was delivered so quickly."

"I do not see how any one could possibly guess the object which brought us here," Burke said. "We have kept our own counsel and have not mentioned the matter to a soul."

"It is evident that we will have to fight a wary and suspicious foe—one who is on the alert and ready to strike at the first signs of danger. This I did not expect, for I thought that so long

a possession would give a sense of security, but I see it is not so."

"But why were you singled out for an attack?" Burke asked. "Why you more than any other stranger?"

"Because I questioned the landlord in regard to the strike that Randal Crawford once made in this neighborhood."

"True, you did."

"And he professed ignorance, although we were told by the stage-driver who brought us in that this Long Pete was one of the first settlers in the camp—that a little whisky saloon, which he ran, was the third building erected in the town. The man's memory was a convenient one, you see; he did not wish to recall Randal Crawford's fight for the valuable property which was wrested from him by force of arms."

"Yes, I remember; all he was willing to acknowledge was that he had once heard of a man by that name operating in this neighborhood, but he 'reckoned' he had never run across him."

"It is very easy to forget what a man does not wish to remember," Teton Tom observed, sarcastically. "But I knew by the expression upon the fellow's face, and the peculiar way in which he looked at me out of the corners of his eyes, that he was not telling the truth."

"You are a close observer, Tom. I was watching the man while he was speaking, and yet I saw nothing out of the way."

"I have been trained from babyhood to read the signs which are in the skies, on the earth, and written on the faces of mankind. I am a half-breed; in my veins flows the red life-current of the Crow Indian, mingled with the blood of the white man. Until I was ten years old I dwelt in the tents of the red-men and was fully as great a savage as any Indian boy in the tribe; in all muscular sports I excelled, and, young as I was, the skill I displayed in the chase, and on the trail, made the old warriors of the nation predict that when I grew to man's estate I would be a chief as great as the mighty Crow nation had ever known."

"This is like a romance!" the other exclaimed.

"It is no romance, only the truth," Teton Tom answered. "Then there came a change in my fortunes. My Indian mother died; she bore the reputation of being the most beautiful squaw that had ever been known along the Upper Missouri. My white father, who was absent at the time, came in sorrow and took me away with him. He was a wealthy man and loved my mother sincerely, although she was naught but an untutored Indian maid, and he was legally married to her, too, just the same as if she had been a white woman, by the priest who was trying to convert the Crows."

"He was an honorable man."

"He was one of nature's noblemen!" Teton Tom exclaimed, impressively. "He sent me to Europe to be educated—he would have done this before, but my Indian mother would never consent either to part with me or to leave her tribe; settled a handsome amount upon me—he was a wealthy man—and so I lacked for nothing."

"You were fortunate."

"Yes, I, the child of the New World, the son of the wilderness, was educated with the noble scions of the old continent."

"I preferred a soldier's life, and was schooled for one, and when I came of age I traveled about, and, like the old-time soldier of fortune, served under a dozen different flags. My father had died shortly after I went to Europe, and so I had no ties to bind me to any one particular place, but in time my heart turned to my native land, and I longed to see the red-men among whom my early days were passed, so I returned to America and went back to my early home."

"The chiefs received me like one who had come from the dead, and I felt that though their skins might be of a dusky hue, yet their hearts were white."

"I had come just in time to assume the rôle of an avenger. Ten years before a white man who had married one of the squaws, and had a pretty little girl, had come to the camp one night and kidnapped the child. Chase was given, but the man escaped with the girl. Now, word was brought that the man had been seen at Fort Assiniboine, and I was deputed to hunt him down. All the clew that I had to him was that he was a big man with a very long beard."

"Not much to go upon."

"No, but I got on the track of such a man at Fort Benton, and although unable to learn his real name, for he gave one at Fort Assiniboine and another at Fort Benton—evidently a rogue of the first water—I happened to come across the letter which led to our acquaintanceship. He had set it on fire and thrust it into a stove, but it failed to burn."

"Of all the stories I have ever heard this is the oddest!" Burke exclaimed.

"Yes, it is a strange tale, and I have an idea that I shall meet this man, who stole the Indian girl away ten years ago, in this town. It is probable that he has altered materially; the removal of the huge beard and the extremely long



hair which he wore would completely change his appearance."

"True, and he, I suppose, is one of the men who attempted to kill me."

"Yes, undoubtedly. Now, while I have not done much talking during our sojourn in this camp, yet I have listened attentively to what other people have said, and I have discovered that the great mine of the town is called the Black Snake; the mayor of the camp is the president and the chief stockholder, and his name is Archibald Crawford."

"Well, that is rather strange!" the young man exclaimed.

"Yes, so it struck me, and now the question arises—is he any kin to your father?"

"That I cannot answer positively, but it is my impression that he is not, for I think my mother said that my father was the only son of an only son, and had no relatives. I am not sure about this, but it is my impression."

"I see, but the chances are that it is correct."

"I think so."

"Is this Archibald Crawford, then, one of the original rascals who seized the mine, and he has changed his name to Crawford so that people will confound him with the original discoverer?"

"That is possible."

"Well, we will get at the truth some day, that is, if they don't succeed in putting us out of the way, for this attack to-night is but the commencement."

"You anticipate that the conspirators are desperate and will endeavor to keep it up until they make an end of us?"

"Yes; I should not be surprised if an attack was made upon us this very night."

"Here in our room?" asked Burke, in surprise.

"Yes; scoundrels like the two I vanquished usually go in gangs, and the gang may attempt to avenge the defeat of their comrades."

"There is a stout bolt upon the door, for I shot it in its place after we entered."

"Yes, I noticed that you did so; but apparently stout bolts are not always as trustworthy as they seem. Examine it carefully and see if the screws which hold the catch in place are all right."

Burke did so, and was amazed to discover that the screws were so loose in their holes that a slight push would displace them.

When he reported this discovery Teton Tom smiled and said:

"It is an old dodge; the regular screws have been withdrawn and smaller ones put in their places. If we had retired to rest, confident in the security of the bolt, see how we would have been deceived."

"Yes; with the bolt in that condition it would be an easy matter for any one to enter the room without making any noise. Does it mean, then, that we are to be attacked to-night?"

"That is my opinion; these fellows are working the game with wonderful sharpness; this bolt has evidently been tampered with this evening since my fight with the desperadoes, for I noticed it when we were assigned the room this afternoon and it was perfectly solid then."

"Yes, yes; it is a trap, no doubt."

"Well, we must prepare to receive them. With our four revolvers we ought to be able to give any unwelcome visitors a warm reception. We will construct a breast-work out of the bed in the further corner here, lie down behind it and fire from the sides; we can tilt the stools up against the door so they will fall and make a noise if any attempt is made to open it."

Burke thought these were capital ideas, and they were immediately carried out.

The bed was placed upon its side lengthwise across the room, the stools tilted up against the door, and then the two, after carefully examining their weapons, laid down behind the bed.

The moonbeams streaming in through the window enabled them to distinguish all objects plainly.

Teton Tom looked at his watch.

"Ten minutes of one," he said. "We will not, in all probability, have long to wait. An attack will be most likely to come between two and three. If you are sleepy, take a nap and I will keep watch."

Burke protested that he never felt less like sleep, and this was true, for the excitement had driven all desire for slumber away.

Two o'clock came.

By this time the camp was buried in slumber, and no sound disturbed the stillness of the night.

"They are coming!" Teton Tom warned.

His quick ears had detected footsteps in the entry.

The door was opened gently; over went the stools with a prodigious clatter, then the door was flung violently open and armed men appeared in the portal.

"Advance a single step within this room, and your blood be on your own heads!" Teton Tom cried, in warning.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE LYNCHERS.

THE intruders were taken completely by surprise; it had been their game to take the strangers unawares, and they were amazed at

having the tables turned upon them in this unexpected manner.

They halted in the doorway, the men behind pushing on those in front, and these worthies posted back, for they had an idea that the men within the room would be as good as their word, and open fire if they attempted to advance.

There were fifteen or sixteen in that party, as nearly as the two pards could make out, all of them brandishing weapons, as ugly a looking set of ruffians as could be scared up in the West.

Confident in their number, they had advanced boldly to the attack on the sleeping men, calculating to make prisoners of the pair before they would be able to offer any resistance, and they were much astonished at this unexpected check.

To seize upon and bind helpless, sleeping men was one thing, and to advance upon a pair of desperate fellows intrenched behind a breast-work, determined to sell their lives as dearly as possible, was another.

True, sixteen men, by a desperate rush, ought to be able to overpower a couple, but it was as certain as anything could be that six or eight of the attackers would be apt to fall before the feat was accomplished, and the men in the advance were likely to be the ones to fall, so, though the fellows who were in the rear, in the entry, were anxious to go on, the leaders in the doorway were not.

After the first moment of the surprise was over, Crooked Smith, who led the gang, cried:

"See hyer, you had better surrender peaceable, and not give us any fight talk, for we have got men enuff hyer to clean you out and not half try!"

"Pitch in and try it on then!" replied Teton Tom, defiantly. "We have twenty-four shots here, and then our knives to fall back on after the guns are played out, and if we cannot lay out two-thirds of your gang, it will be mighty strange, so pitch in as soon as you please!"

"I want you to understand that we ain't no gang!" Crooked Smith declared. "We are officers of the law, we are, and we come to arrest you, the bull town is back on us, and if you lay us out, you can't whip the camp, nohow!"

"Upon what charge are you going to arrest us?"

"For the murder of Diamond Joe, the man you shot last night!"

"Is he dead?"

"Wa-al, he is so near it that thar ain't no fun into it!" Crooked Smith replied. "We ar' jest going to arrest and hold you until we see whether he is going to kick the bucket or not. You needn't be afeard, 'cos you are going to git the squarest kind of a deal. You will have a trial, all right and reg'lar, and if you wasn't to blame in the affair, you hain't got no cause to be afeard."

By this time Teton Tom had recognized the speaker.

"Aha! it is you is it? Well, I thought I recognized your voice! Now do you think I am fool enough to believe that I would get any fair show at the hands of such a gang as would be apt to follow your lead? Oh, no! I am no tenderfoot, and you cannot fool me for a cent! You are a party of lynch-chaps—that is your game, and the only show I would get at your hands would be a rope!"

"Oh, no, we ar' all squar' men!" the fellow protested.

"Not much!" cried Teton Tom in contempt. "I am up to your little game, and it will not work! I would not surrender if there were forty of you! If I have got to die, I might as well have company on my trip to the happy hunting-grounds; if death must come it is better to perish like a man, fighting to the last gasp, than to submit to be strangled like a dog!"

The ruffians were perplexed; the advantage of the situation was surely with the assailed men.

That they could be hunted out from behind their intrenchment was possible, but it would surely cost a score of lives, and these fellows were not willing to yield up their own lives even for the satisfaction of killing the man who defied them.

"You had better quit this fool talk and give up!" Crooked Smith exclaimed. "I ain't blood-thirsty—I ain't anxious to have you killed outright, without any chance for trial, as you will be if I let the boys git at you."

"Oh, don't worry about us!" Teton Tom retorted. "The chances are big that it will not be our funeral! We have got the advantage, and we can whip you out of your boots! Sail in and see how we will bore holes through you, and after we have laid out the first six or eight, I reckon the rest will not be in a hurry to come to close quarters."

The ruffians looked at each other as these bold words fell upon their ears.

The most of them had gone into the thing, expecting that it was going to be a "picnic," so Crooked Smith had assured them, but this certainly did not seem much like one.

"We will give you jest five min'tes for to come out and surrender!" Crooked Smith blus-

tered. "This is your last chance and don't you make any mistake! It goes ag'in' my grain to kill a good man like you in cold blood, but if you don't surrender I shall have to sic the boys onto you, and I have got the hardest crowd at my back hyer that kin be raised in the hull of Montana!"

"No doubt about that!" Teton Tom retorted. "I can easily tell from the looks of your gang that the chances are big there is not a man in it who ought not to have been hung long ago!"

This uncomplimentary allusion roused the wrath of the intruders, and, with hoarse cries of rage, they called upon Crooked Smith to say the word and they would "wade in" and make mince-meat out of the pair.

"Do you hear that?" Crooked Smith exclaimed. "Do you hear how anxious the boys ar' to git at ye? I tell you, sport, you don't stand no more chance against this crowd than nothing at all! They will chew you right up!"

"Oh, bosh!" Teton Tom cried, contemptuously. "You are only wasting your breath. You might as well attempt to talk a solid rock out of the earth as to talk us out of this. If you mean business go at it and don't fool any more!"

"I am only talking to give you two a chance!" Crooked Smith exclaimed. "You are a man with sand! Any galoot kin see that with half an eye—and it goes ag'in' my grain for to see you killed in cold blood! I am a good, squar' man, I am, and I want to give you a chance for your life!"

"You are a pack of infernal cowards!" Teton Tom cried. "You know we have got the best of the situation, and you are afraid to come up to the rack and take your fodder like men. But I am tired of wasting breath upon such a gang of curs. You give us five minutes to come out; now I will give you three minutes to skip, and at the end of that time if you haven't made yourselves scarce, I will open fire and see out of how many jobs I can cheat the hangman!"

Greatly enraged were the intruders at thus being so boldly defied.

They brandished their weapons with hoarse cries of rage and clamored for the blood of the daring speaker.

But it was the men in the rear—safe in the entry, out of range of fire, who were most vociferous in demanding a chance to kill the strangers.

Crooked Smith and the three men, who, with him were crowded in the doorway, were in a quandary.

It was all very well for the fellows in the entry, who were not exposed to danger, to yell out a ferocious demand to be led to the attack, but the doorway men would have to stand the brunt of the battle, and if they were shot down—and the chances seemed big to them that they would be—would the others push on and avenge their fate? Although, to fellows like Crooked Smith and his pards such a thing would be an extremely poor consolation for death, or a fearful wound.

"Git all ready, boys!" Crooked Smith exclaimed, after a pause. "Since they will have it, they hain't got anybody to blame but themselves if they git skinned alive!"

"The three minutes are up! Go for them, Burke!" sung out Teton Tom.

Crack! crack! went the revolvers of the pards.

Purposely they fired high, for as Teton Tom had said in a whisper to his companion:

"Don't aim to kill, unless you see that they are really coming at us. I think we can stampede the crowd with a few shots. I do not believe that they have sand enough to stand the racket!"

This assumption was correct, for the moment the bullets whisted through the doorway, over the heads of the murderous talking gang, the fellows broke and ran like a flock of sheep, frightened by the appearance of a wolf.

The men in the rear, who had been loudest in their demands to be allowed a chance to kill the pards were the quickest to retreat.

The lynch-chaps fairly tumbled over each other in their haste to get away from the dangerous spot.

The pards were quick to improve their advantage. They followed the mob, chased them through the entry and down the stairs, and about half the gang, in their headlong haste, rolled from the top to the bottom of the flight of steps.

The hotel was in an uproar; the lodgers rushed out in wild confusion, the most of them in exceedingly scanty attire, and such a scene of confusion the town had not witnessed for many a day.

The rout of the lynch-party was complete, and Bearfoot Bar began to be of the opinion that Teton Tom had about as much sand as any man who had ever struck the camp.

"I reckon we will not be disturbed again," the adventurer remarked, grimly, when at his request, the landlord gave them another room.

## CHAPTER IX.

### A FRIENDLY WARNING.

THE pards were up early in the morning. As Teton Tom had calculated, no further at-



tempt was made to molest them. The bolt upon the door of the second room was all right, and the Half-Blood remarked, to his companion:

"After the decided failure of the first attempt it will take some time for our enemies to hatch up a new scheme. You see, the men who are in the background are too wary to show their hands, but trust to hired bravos to do their dirty work."

The conclusion was correct. They were not disturbed.

When the two went down to breakfast they found themselves the lions of the hour.

Early as it was, the news of the fight had spread throughout the camp, and the pards were warmly congratulated by the miners upon the gallant way in which they had repulsed the lynch-party.

As the two had suspected, the gang was made up of the worst men in the town, friends and associates of Diamond Joe and Crooked Smith, fellows who were always ready for any mischief.

"Oh, I knew that it was not any regular Vigilantes," Teton Tom explained. "If it had been, and I was sure they fairly represented the town, I would not have thought of showing fight. I am too much of a gentleman to want to stay in any town where the inhabitants come to the conclusion that my room is better than my company."

Thereupon the citizens took pains to assure Teton Tom that Crooked Smith and his gang did not represent the town; they were a lot of roughs and desperadoes, and it would be a benefit to the camp if Bearfoot Bar was rid of them.

"Well, I don't set myself up for a bad man, but if those fellows bother me any more I shall be obliged to go a gunning for some of them, and after I get through there is a chance that there will not be so many of the gang as there is now," Teton Tom remarked, quietly, but with an air which impressed the hearers that it was no idle boast.

After they finished their breakfast the pards went to the stand presided over by Cherry to get cigars.

As there was no one near there was a chance for the exchange of a few words.

"All the town is talking about your bold fight last night," the girl said, as she spread out a handful of cigars for their inspection.

"Well, we did have rather a lively time," Teton Tom replied.

"I suppose you understand that this Crooked Smith and his gang are not men to undertake such an attack without there is a good reason for it."

The adventurer was quick to catch the girl's meaning.

"Revenge for the wounding of their pard was not a strong enough motive, to say nothing of Crooked Smith's desire to get square with me?"

"Oh, no; the fellow would be quick enough to do you an injury if the chance came in his way, but he has not the head to plan such an attack as he led last night."

"I understand that; the men in the background are superior to this gang in every respect, and it looks as if they had come to the determination to make the town too hot to hold me."

"Yes, it seems so."

"But I am going to stay right here, all the same!"

"You are a brave man!" the girl exclaimed, with an admiring glance.

"More obstinate than brave perhaps!" Teton Tom replied with a laugh.

"Oh, no, all are of the opinion that no better man than you has ever come to the camp."

"They do me proud!" the other exclaimed, good-naturedly. "But I do not think that it required any particular bravery to put that crowd of blustering cowards to flight. They were brave enough when they expected to pitch upon two helpless men, but when it came to an actual fight, the fellows really tumbled over each other in their haste to get away. But I say, you can do me a service if you will."

"I shall be glad to oblige you!" Cherry exclaimed, quickly.

"Keep your eyes open and if you learn anything which will be a benefit for me to know tell me."

"Oh, yes, I will do that."

"And, perhaps, there may come a day when I will be able to return the service."

"Perhaps; one never knows what will happen in this uncertain world," the girl said with a slight sigh.

"It strikes me that you are not as happy as you might be," Teton Tom remarked, with a searching glance at the dark, handsome face of Cherry.

"Possibly not, few people are."

A couple of miners happening to saunter up to the stand at this moment caused a change in the conversation.

"By the way, I have been told that you have an odd character in the camp who tells fortunes," Teton Tom said.

"Yes, Dumb Dickey."

"I reckon I must give him a call and see if

this camp is going to be a lucky one for me," the adventurer remarked.

"You will find him up the gulch—about half a mile. He lives in a cave dug out in the hill side," the girl explained.

"If I go straight up the gulch I will not be apt to miss it?" Teton Tom said.

"No, and as it is a bright day you will be almost certain to find the old man seated in front of the cave sunning himself."

"I reckon we will take a stroll up that way." Then the adventurer paid for the cigars, the pards lit them and departed.

"The girl is disposed to be extremely friendly," Burke remarked, after the pair were in the street and on their way up the gulch.

"Yes, and I am disposed to be extremely friendly to her," Teton Tom replied. "I have not fallen in love with her, mind, so don't run away with that idea. But there is something about the girl that interests me."

"Is she not a half-blood like yourself?"

"She looks like one, but I heard some of the miners speaking about the matter last night, and they said she declared she was not, and rather seemed to resent the idea of being thought to have Indian blood in her veins, but it is my impression that she has, although she may not know it, and it may be that fact—like the tie of kindred, you know, is what attracts me to her."

"I think you are disposed to form strong friendships," Burke remarked. "Take my own case for instance. Here you have plunged into my quarrel, and fighting it as bravely as if it were all your own."

"That is true, but I have got interested, and being a soldier of fortune by profession—and by nature, too, I think—it is as natural for me to fight as hard for a stranger, when once I espouse his cause, as I would for myself."

"Well, I certainly owe you more than I shall ever be able to pay," the young man exclaimed, frankly. "I should have been no match for these scoundrels, and if I had attempted this quest alone, I should, undoubtedly, have made an utter failure of it."

"Don't let the weight of obligation trouble you; we will square the account all right one of these days," Teton Tom replied, with a laugh.

## CHAPTER X.

### DUMB DICKEY.

As the pards proceeded up the gulch, they passed directly in front of the Black Snake Mine, and Archibald Crawford, who was sitting in the office of the works, caught sight of them as they passed.

The office was in the front room of a cabin built of slabs, the rear apartment being used as a sleeping chamber for the mayor, who got his meals at the hotel, an arrangement common to the business men of Bearfoot Bar.

With the mayor was the Irish lawyer, who was his constant companion, and a thick-set, muscular fellow, with a bushy red beard and a thick shock of hair of the same fiery hue.

This was George Livingstone, Marshal of Bearfoot Bar, and reported to be one of the biggest desperadoes in the district.

The inhabitants of the far Western towns very often go on the principle of "set a rogue to catch a rogue," and select the greatest desperado in the camp for the marshal.

It was certainly so in this case, for Livingstone was a tough customer. Being a man of muscular proportions, a hard drinker, and possessed of a rather bad temper, it did not take much to get him on the war-path.

His great specialty was wrestling; he was reputed to be the best in the district; that was not saying much, of course, for none of the men could claim to be more than amateurs, and from the success which he had met with in throwing his opponents he had got the name of Anaconda George, and no one thought of calling him anything else.

Such a name as Livingstone was "too durned high-strung for Montana, anyhow," to use the lingo of the district.

The marshal had just entered the mayor's office and was speaking in regard to the attack of the lynchers on the two strangers when the pards came by the office.

"There are the two fellows now," said the mayor, a dark look in his eyes, as he directed the marshal's attention to the pards.

"That is so!" ejaculated Anaconda George, and he stared through the window at the pair, who walked by, unconscious that they were observed.

"That 'ar' Teton Tom is a mighty likely made cuss," the marshal continued, with the air of a judge. "This is the first chance I have had to size him up and see wot he is like. I did not git a good look at him last night. A leetle weak 'round the waist, seems to me," and Anaconda George cast a complacent glance at his own massive proportions. "A leetle too much built onto the greyhound plan; sich men are apt to be so fine drawn that they break in two when it comes to a real, tough old struggle."

"According to all accounts he banged Diamond Joe and Crooked Smith in a way they despised," the mayor remarked.

"So I heerd," the marshal answered, assuming an air of deep reflection. "Wal, I should not be surprised if the galoot was rayther quick on his pins, and sich light-waisted men as he is ar' apt to be spry and handy with their fists."

"Joe and Smith found him so; too spry and handy to suit them."

"That is likely; neither one of 'em amounts to shucks when it comes to a fist fight, or a wrastle; they are keen with their we'pons, but when you say that you size 'em up for all they ar' worth!"

"It is very evident that whether Diamond Joe and Crooked Smith are good men or not, they are no match for this sport," the mayor observed.

"You can bet high on that!" the marshal assented.

"I wonder where these fellows are bound now?" Crawford remarked.

"Oh, I reckon they are jest taking in the town—seeing what the camp looks like. I heerd talk among the boys last night that these sports were thinking 'bout locating hyer, and I s'pose they are jest kinder prospecting 'round."

"Oh, no; they have no idea of settling down here!" the mayor exclaimed. "That is only a gag to blind the eyes of the boys!"

The marshal looked amazed at this strong and abrupt declaration.

"Wal, I didn't reckon that they were up to no game," Anaconda George remarked, scratching his head in a thoughtful way, as though the process would stimulate his ideas.

"They are a couple of sharps on the make, and the camp will find it out, too, before they have been here long."

"Is that the way you size 'em up?"

"Yes; and you will find that I am correct, too. I have seen too many such roosters to be deceived."

"Wal, they do look like sharps, for sure."

"No doubt about it at all; and the first thing you know they will be opening a game somewhere in the camp."

"I reckon we have got enuff games running now," the marshal declared. "Most of the sports are growling already, swearing that thar ar' a heap sight more wolves in the camp than sheep, and that it is all they kin do to make running expenses."

"Yes, we certainly do not need any more sports in the camp," the mayor said, decidedly. "And if I were running a game here I reckon I should do all I could to make it unpleasant for this precious pair."

"Yas; I s'pose it wouldn't be a bad idee to jest pass the word round among the boys that these hyer strangers ar' sports who will be apt to set up a game and that they had better hustle themselves for to stop it."

"It will not do any harm," the mayor replied.

He had kept his eyes fixed on the strangers during the conversation, and had evidently been speculating as to where they were bound, for he now exclaimed, abruptly:

"I will bet a hat that I know where they are going!"

"Is that so?"

"Yes; they are going up the gulch to see that idiot, Dumb Dickey. They were speaking about going to see him in the hotel yesterday. These gamblers are all superstitious, you know, and when they found that the fool told fortunes they were taken with the idea of consulting him."

"Like as not. It is the sports of this hyer camp that keep the old man alive," the marshal remarked. "When they haven't anything else to do they go two bits on him jest for the fun of hearing the old galoot spin his yarns, and he kin talk like a Dutch uncle, too, when he wants to, though he is as dumb as a clam if you don't git him started on fortune-telling."

"I think that old rascal is a fraud, and he ought to be warned out of the camp," the mayor declared. "He is nothing but a drunken old vagabond, a disgrace to any decent town."

"He 'bout lives on whisky, and I reckon it is time he was on the move. He has stayed hyer now a heap sight longer than he usually does."

"Suppose you go up and give him a hint that the camp thinks it is about time to travel," suggested Crawford.

"All right, I will, and I kin see wot these two sports ar' like at the same time," said the marshal, rising. "I would kinder like to have a talk with this Teton Tom, and since he has set himself up for a big chief, I wouldn't mind trying a leetle wrastle with him, jest for greens, you know; jest to kinder sample him so as to find out how big a chief he r'ally is."

"A good idea!" exclaimed the mayor. "I would do it if I were you, but I am betting high, Anaconda, that when it comes to a clinch, no such man as this sport has any business with you."

"Wal, I am kinder reckoning that way, myself, but you know, Mister Mayor, you never kin tell much 'bout sich things until you find out for sure, but I reckon I will sample him before he has been long in this hyer camp."

The marshal spoke with caution, yet there was a smile on his face which belied his words, and his manner plainly revealed that he had



no doubt he could easily conquer the stranger sport.

The marshal left the office and proceeded leisurely up the gulch, following in the footsteps of the two pards.

Leaving the marshal to pursue his way we will follow the friends.

As the girl had said, the cave-home of Dumb Dickey was easily found and, as she had predicted, the old man sat in front of it basking in the warm rays of the sun.

An odder, more peculiar specimen of a man the eyes of the two had never looked upon.

He was gaunt and haggard, a man who looked to be fully eighty years old; he had evidently once been tall and muscularly built, but now he was barely more than a skeleton, and his form bent almost double; his long iron-gray hair came in matted locks down to his shoulders, a thin straggly beard of a whiter hue reached half-way to his waist. He was dressed in an old buckskin hunting-suit, which had once evidently adorned the person of some Indian brave, but it was now so tattered and torn that it barely hung together. His feet were protected by a rude pair of sandals, the leather soles of some discarded shoes, bound on with strips of skin.

As the pards halted by his side the old man turned his eyes upon them and then, in harsh, shrill tones, he said, addressing Teton Tom:

"Colonel Randal Crawford, I am glad to welcome you back to Bearfoot Bar! It is many a long day since I had the pleasure of gazing upon your face, but although I am not so young as I once was, yet, thank Heaven! my memory is not at all impaired. I am weak physically, but mentally as strong as ever."

The pards looked at each other in amazement, not knowing what to make of this strange declaration.

"I beg your pardon, sir, what did you say?" Teton Tom asked.

"Why do you ask that question, colonel?" the old man exclaimed in a querulous way. "You surely have not lost the use of your ears. I spoke perfectly distinctly, and you certainly must have understood what I said."

"Oh, yes, I heard your words, but I do not understand their meaning. You addressed me as Colonel Randal Crawford, but that is not my name."

"No?" the old man said in an indifferent way.

"My name is Thomas Teton, better known, perhaps, here in Montana as Teton Tom."

"On, yes, I understand all about that!" the old man exclaimed with a dignified wave of his hand.

"In this uncertain life of ours men sometimes bear many names. I understand; Bearfoot Bar has changed since the old days; upon your return here you find yourself in the midst of enemies, and so you disguise your identity under a false appellation."

Again the two friends looked at each other in wonder. What strange delusion was this that had taken possession of the old man?

"My friend, you have made some mistake; this is my first visit to Bearfoot Bar."

"No, no, no!" exclaimed the other, testily, "why do you say that? You must not attempt to deceive me. Don't you know that I am a prophet and the son of a prophet—that the future which is to the rest of mankind as a sealed book is to me but an open page?"

"Yes, we understood that you were learned in the fortune-teller's art, and that is why we came," Teton Tom explained.

"I am not surprised by your visit, although it has been a long and weary wait for me."

"How?—you expected us?" Teton Tom asked, amazed.

"I expected you—not this young man, although I comprehend now some of the signs which were not plain to me before; sometimes it is extremely difficult to understand the warnings. This is a friend who has come to aid you to win your own again."

The pards were puzzled; the old man's words seemed to indicate that though he had made a mistake in the parties, yet he had a knowledge of the quest which had brought them to the wilds of Montana.

Of course, neither of the two had visited the old man with any idea of having their fortunes told; that was only a ruse to get him to talk, and when he got started they hoped to draw from him the history of the early settlement of the town, which would include the contest that had cost Colonel Randal Crawford his mine and his life, for that he was dead there seemed no room for doubting; had he been alive he surely would have made himself known to somebody during all these years.

"Yes, yes," the old man continued. "I have been expecting you for twenty years."

"Oh, can't you see that I am not the man you take me to be?" Teton Tom exclaimed. "Twenty years ago I was a slip of a boy."

"No, no, you were a man of thirty-five, and as fine a fellow as ever trod the soil of Montana. I remember you perfectly well—I remember the day when, by a chance stroke of the pick, you discovered the rich lode now known as the Black Snake Claim."

"I remember how you worked to develop the

claim, and then how a gang of scoundrels formed a league to wrest the property from you."

"Why, it all comes back to me, colonel, as plainly as though it was only yesterday."

"Yes, yes, go on!" exclaimed Teton Tom, deeply interested.

The pards fancied that they were about to hear the story which they so desired to learn, yet there was a lingering doubt in their minds as to whether the old man could be trusted to tell the truth.

"It is a melancholy story, a revelation of the worst side of human nature, and goes to show what man will do when the baser passions take possession of the mind."

"Go ahead and give us the history!" exclaimed Burke, anxiously.

"But why waste time in speaking of the past?" the old man exclaimed. "The future—the future! that, colonel, is important for you to know."

"Tell us of the past first, then we can come to the present, and after that to the future," Teton Tom suggested. "That is the usual test of the ability of a prophet."

"Very well, colonel, we will proceed in that way," and then the sound of footsteps fell upon the ears of the three, and, looking down the gulch, they saw Anaconda George approaching.

"It is the town marshal, Anaconda George," the old man exclaimed, with a dubious shake of the head. "As big a scoundrel as there is in the camp; and I fear he comes on no good intent."

## CHAPTER XI.

### A "WRASTLING" LESSON.

"WHETHER scoundrel or honest man, his looks are decidedly against him," Teton Tom observed.

"Yes, he is a hang-dog looking rascal!" Burke exclaimed.

"His looks do not belie him, gentlemen; he is one of the terrors of the camp!" the old man asserted. "And I fancy I can see a menace in his look; he comes to make mischief."

The marshal was advancing with considerable of a swagger, an ugly look perceptible upon his face.

"I reckon he will not trouble any of us, even if he is the marshal of the town, and a bad man," Teton Tom remarked, quietly, for Anaconda George was now close at hand.

"How are ye?" exclaimed the marshal gruffly, with a slight nod as he came up to the party.

The others returned the salutation.

"I hope you strangers ain't wasting any money on this old fraud!" the marshal continued. "He is a durned old whisky-sucker who ought to have been warned out of the camp long ago, and if I had had my way sich beats as this old galoot wouldn't be allowed to stay in the town over four-and-twenty hours; I would jest light on to 'em as soon as they struck the camp, and I'd say to 'em, 'see hyer, we ain't got no room for no sich trash as you ar', and I give you jest four-and-twenty hours to git!' That is the way I would lay down the law to 'em, but the mayor is kinder soft of heart, and so he has let this old snoozer hang out hyer, but the jig is up now, and you have got to quit!"

The man's tone was offensive in the extreme, and he looked at the pards in a peculiar way, as much as to say, "Don't you dare to interfere in this matter."

The look was a challenge which Teton Tom was prompt to accept.

"Well, I reckon you must have a strange kind of a camp here!" the adventurer exclaimed. "Hain't the officials of the town any more important business than to bother their heads about an inoffensive old man like this one? Why don't you go for some of the gamblers and desperadoes of the camp? I am a stranger here, but I will bet ten to one that I can find twenty men in the town who ought to be made to emigrate instead of this one old fellow!"

The marshal was surprised by this speech. He had not anticipated that Teton Tom would take the old man's part so promptly, but as it was just what he wanted, for he sought an excuse for a quarrel, he was glad the sport had not been "backward in coming forward."

"Say! I reckon that you are kinder interfering in a matter that don't consarn you!" Anaconda George exclaimed.

"Well, I don't know about that!" Teton Tom replied, with a glint of fire in his dark eyes.

"You are a stranger hyer—what is it to you how we run the town?"

"I reckon that hasn't anything to do with it—my being a stranger. I am in the town now, and I expect to stay for a while, so it is my impression that I have a right to take an interest in what goes on, but whether I have the right or not, I am going to take it, all the same."

"There is no need of making any trouble about the matter," the old man remarked at this point. "It does not matter to me where I am; one camp is as good as another as far as I am concerned."

"Oh, it is the principle of the thing that I object to!" Teton Tom exclaimed, promptly. "This is about as high-handed an outrage as I

ever struck! The idea of a man being warned out of a camp simply because he drinks a little whisky and amuses himself by telling fortunes! Why, the idea is ridiculous!"

"Mebbe you had better undertake to run the camp yourself since you know so much about it!" Anaconda George exclaimed, with a sneer.

"Well, I would not waste my time in gunning for any such game as this old man, when there were bigger birds to be got. But there is one point about the matter which shows that your head is level. This man is sure not to fight, but if you tackled one of the gamblers or desperadoes of the camp you might find you had bit off more than you could chew."

The face of the marshal grew black with rage. He had expected to provoke the stranger into a quarrel, but for all that he was not prepared for any such "back talk" as this.

"You don't know me or else you wouldn't say anything of that kind!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, I reckon a man doesn't have to summer and winter a fellow before he finds out what kind of a hairpin he is!" Teton Tom retorted. "You may be a good man; you are big enough to be, but it is my calculation that you would take the job of warning an old man, like this one here, out of a camp a mighty sight quicker than if he was a man like myself."

This bold speech afforded the marshal an opportunity, and he was quick to improve it.

"Mebbe I will have a chance to tell you that the camp thinks your room is a durned sight better than your company afore long!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, I reckon not," Teton Tom replied. His quick wits warned him that he was on the trail of a new scheme to worry him, and he was anxious to induce the marshal to explain.

"I reckon yes!"

"Oh, no, I am one of the quietest and best-behaved men in the world, never get mixed up in any trouble, if I can help myself, and never was warned out of a camp in my life."

"Thar has got to be a furst time, you know, and though you may talk as if butter wouldn't melt in your mouth, yet I reckon we ar' onto your leetle game, like a thousand of bricks!"

"My leetle game, eh, and what may that be?" Teton Tom inquired.

"Why, you are a sport, of course, and you come hyer with the idee of skinning the camp, but I kin tell you, right to once, that it is a hundred to one you won't make no big winnings in this hyer camp. Thar's too many sharks hyer now—too many wolves, and thar ain't sheep enuff to go 'round, and though you may reckon yourself to be a reg'lar king gambler, yet thar ar' plenty of men in the town as good as you ar', and the chances are big you'll be durned sorry you ever struck this camp afore you have been hyer a week."

"Oh, you are away off!" Teton Tom exclaimed. "I am no gambler, and did not come to Bearfoot Bar with any idea of running a game, and, I reckon, you will find that I will be as good a citizen as you have in the camp."

"Of course you won't own up!" the marshal sneered. "I did not expect you would. You are one of the fly chaps that play smart so as to catch suckers, but you won't catch any in this hyer town, 'cos, as I said, we ar' onto you, and I shall make it my business to spile any leetle game that I see you trying to work, and I give you fair warning too, you don't want to interfere with a man about my size or you will get into trouble. You stuck your oar in 'bout this old hummer, but you had better not do it ag'in!" And Anaconda George shook his head in a menacing way.

"Oh, do you fancy you can muzzle me?"

"Wal, I mean to try!" cried the marshal.

"You cannot do it, and if you are wise you will not make the attempt!" Teton Tom replied.

"I reckon you set yourself up for a fighter?"

"No, but I reckon I can hold my own so that no man will be able to walk over me, not even if he is the marshal of the town."

This was a direct challenge, and Anaconda George was not slow in taking it up.

"Say! I don't want to take any unfair advantage of you!" he cried in a bullying way. "You are a stranger hyer and you don't know me. The boys call me Anaconda George, and I am the boss wrastler from Wrastleville! When I git a grip onto a man he either goes down or I break him in two!"

"Oh, you don't frighten me with your boasts! I am not afraid to meet you in any way you like!"

"Will you try a fall?" cried the marshal, eagerly.

"As many as you like!" was the prompt reply.

"Oh, thar won't be many!" Anaconda George cried with a savage grin. "I reckon that one will satisfy you. When I git my grip onto you and sling you to airth you will kinder reckon that some blamed thunderbolt hit ye!"

"If you are not an extra good man then you are the biggest blow-hard that I ever met," Teton Tom remarked as he took off his coat and gave his weapons to Burke.

As the marshal wore no coat, in the free-and-easy style common to the wild West, all the preparation he required was to remove his hat



and weapons, roll up his shirt-sleeves, and tighten the belt around his waist a little.

Teton Tom took similar precautions.

"Now how will you have it?" the marshal cried as he faced his opponent.

"Just as you like!"

"Catch-as-catch-can?"

"That suits me!"

"Say! if this turns out a long fit of sickness for you, thar'll be nobody to blame but yourself!" the marshal cried.

"Oh, I will run my chances on that, and if I squeeze the life out of you, your friends mustn't blame me if the camp has to look around for another big bully to serve for a marshal."

The taunt made Anaconda George grind his teeth.

"Jest wait until I git my hands onto ye!" he threatened.

"Oh, come on! pitch in and stop your blowing!" exclaimed Teton Tom, contemptuously.

"Don't waste your time in talking. If it is your little game to get me riled with your boasts so you can obtain an advantage, I can tell you, right off, that the thing will not work. You are a bully and a scoundrel—there is no doubt about that, but you are not half so smart as you think you are."

Teton Tom had penetrated the designs of the other. It was Anaconda George's favorite trick; in this case, though, not only had it failed, but Teton Tom's taunts had made him furiously mad.

The pitfall which he had prepared for his foe he had fallen into himself.

"I'll crush the very life outen you!" he yelled, and then rushed at Teton Tom with the fury of a mad bull.

But though it looked as if the marshal had the advantage on account of his superior size and weight, yet it was not so; as an athlete, Teton Tom was a far better man than his opponent; bone and fat do not count in a contest of this kind, and then, too, Teton Tom was a trained and practiced wrestler; he had been taught the art by a Cornish man, amid the mines of Cornwall, famous for its stout English champions; in his travels, too, in various climes, he had contended with the trained wrestlers of many nations, learning something new from each man whom he encountered, and it is safe to say that the Marshal of Bearfoot Bar could hardly have found in all the big United States a more dangerous opponent.

Anaconda George little suspected this though, and confident in his superior strength, he rushed at Teton Tom, anxious to teach him that he was not the biggest chief in the Prickly Pear region.

As he came on, he determined exactly how he would seize his foe, but in a peculiarly dexterous way, Teton Tom evaded his grasp, and in place of securing the "under hold" upon which he had calculated, his adversary gripped him in a manner which completely astonished the big fellow.

He found Teton Tom to be not only as strong as steel, but as wiry and slippery as an eel.

For about a minute the men tugged at each other, Anaconda George putting forth all his power to break the "lock" which his opponent had secured, and then with a sudden twist, Teton Tom "back-heeled" his opponent and down with a mighty shock, went the marshal, Teton Tom dextrously lending his own weight to increase the violence of the fall.

In his many wrestling encounters Anaconda George had not escaped a fall now and then, but he had never got one anywhere near as bad as this.

Teton Tom was on his feet again in a second, as nimble as a cat, and showing no signs of violent exertions.

Anaconda George, on the contrary, rose slowly, and his breath came hard and fast; the weight of his bone and fat made "bellows to mend."

But the marshal, being a dull-minded brute, did not even yet comprehend that he was no match for his opponent.

He regarded his fall as the result of an accident. His antagonist was more nimble, and contrived in some way to give him the "foot," but he was confident the trick could not be worked again.

"Well, I managed to down you that time!" Teton Tom exclaimed, laughing in the face of the marshal.

"You did it by a durned slippery trick!" the big fellow retorted, in a rage. "But I am onto you now, and I reckon you can't come any lee-tee hanky-panky game of that kind ag'in."

"Why, you don't know as much about wrestling as I thought you did!" Teton Tom exclaimed, contemptuously.

"It was jest an accident, that was all, and my foot slipped when you got the crook on!" the marshal asserted.

"Oh, don't give us any more such talk as that or I shall begin to think you never wrestled a man in your life!" Teton Tom retorted. "But since you are not satisfied, come on again and I will show you a Cornish wrestler's trick which will be apt to knock a little sense into your thick head!"

Goaded on by the taunt, Anaconda George

made another desperate rush at the stranger, but as before Teton Tom managed to evade his grasp and secured one of his own, and then, by a series of peculiar maneuvers—the marshal was never able to explain just how it was done—Teton Tom got Anaconda's head under his right arm and, using his hip as a fulcrum, threw the marshal clear over his head backward.

It was the fall known to the "fancy" as "a cross-buttock."

Down came Anaconda George on the flat of his back with such terrific force that it seemed almost enough to fairly knock the life out of him.

Young Burke looked astonished. As a Harvard student he had seen plenty of boxing and wrestling matches, but never a man more worthy to be regarded as a champion than his friend.

Teton Tom's words were prophetic; this fall did knock some sense into Anaconda George.

For fully five minutes he lay on the ground half-stunned, and then, gradually recovering, rose to his feet, feeling sore and lame.

"I am all ready for you!" Teton Tom exclaimed, assuming a position as if he expected the marshal to make another rush at him.

"Wal, you may be, but I am durned if I am ready for you!" Anaconda George growled.

"You are not satisfied already?" Teton Tom exclaimed, in a tone of astonishment. "Why, I have only just begun! I have half a dozen more tricks to show you!"

"I will be eternally durned if you show me any more!" the marshal exclaimed, in deep disgust. "By the everlasting hills! I feel as if I didn't have a hull bone in my body! It is all right; I ain't a-grumbling a mite! I picked the fuss myself and thar ain't nobody else to blame!"

"But how about the old man here," and Teton Tom nodded toward Dumb Dickey. "I suppose there will not be any objection to his holding on in the camp for a while longer?"

"Wal, the mayor allowed that I ought to tell him to git, but as long as you stand up for him I reckon he kin stay. I, for sure, ain't going to buck up ag'in' you ag'in. I pass after this, I do; so-long!"

And then the marshal departed, a sorer and wiser man than when he came.

"I have fixed that all right for you," Teton Tom remarked when Anaconda George was out of hearing.

"And now we will resume our birds' egging. Tell us of the past."

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE PROPHET SPEAKS.

"THE past, yes, yes, but that is no test of a prophet, you know," the old man urged.

"Never mind that; as a genuine soothsayer, you ought to be willing to oblige your patrons."

"Yes, that is true," and the old man nodded, with a wise look on his wrinkled face. "Well, then, for the past."

"You, colonel, were the original discoverer of the treasures contained in this gulch; your guide was an Indian of the Crow tribe, whose favorite hunting-ground was in this region, and he led you to the spot."

"You located the Black Snake Mine, and then discovering that the claim was too big for one man to handle, for it needed expensive machinery, you tried to bond the mine and endeavored to form a company, and the very men whom you believed to be your friends hatched a conspiracy to rob you of your property. The claim was jumped during your absence and you were obliged to hurry back from Fort Benton, whither you had gone to see your wife and baby boy, in order to fight the robbers."

The old man paused at this point, and the pards looked at each other; the same thought—that the old man was well-informed—had come to both.

"The struggle was a brief and bloody one," Dumb Dickey continued. "You made a night attack, trusting to recapture the mine by a sudden dash; the attempt failed, your party were beaten in the fight, and you, shot through the body, mortally wounded, as all believed, fell into the creek; it was the period of high water—the spring freshets were on—you were swept away by the swift current, and that was the last that anybody in Bearfoot Bar saw of Colonel Randal Crawford."

Again the young men exchanged glances—Dumb Dickey was not paying any attention to them, but, with his eyes fixed upon the distant hills, was talking away as though he were reciting a lesson.

The tale that the detective had brought East to the sorrowing wife was true. Randal Crawford had perished in the fight for the mine, and the old man's recital of how he had fallen into the river accounted for the fact that his body had never been discovered.

"It is a sad tale!" Teton Tom remarked.

"Yes, and never was there one more full of base treachery!" the old man declared. "The discoverer of the Black Snake Mine was betrayed by the very men who owed almost everything they had in the world to him."

"And this happened twenty odd years ago?" Teton Tom remarked, thoughtfully.

"Yes, that is the past, and now for the present."

"I fancy we know all about the present," Burke exclaimed. "The men who stole the mine away from Colonel Randal Crawford are now in possession of it. They are rich and are daily becoming richer—the scoundrels who ought to be hanged for murder!"

Burke spoke with heat, and his young blood boiled with indignation in his veins as he reflected upon the treacherous work.

"Your statement is correct, and yet it is not correct," the old man remarked. "There is a strange contradiction for you, eh?"

"Yes, explain it!" Teton Tom requested.

"The men who seized the mine were a gang of ruffians, men who would cut a throat for ten dollars; they leagued together to jump the Black Snake property; it was a source of wonder to the camp at the time why these scoundrels should undertake a venture of the kind, but after the death of Crawford they disposed of the claim to three men who had always been supposed to be fast friends of the colonel. Those three men now own the property."

"Observe, they had nothing to do with the fight—they did not lift a finger either to seize the mine, or to defend it."

"But they bought it from the scoundrels who stole the property!" Burke observed, hotly.

"Yes, that is true, but you must remember that these scoundrels were in possession of the property," the old man observed. "Even in the East—in civilized communities, where the law reigns supreme, possession is considered to be nine points out of ten; in this region it is usually the whole ten. Crawford was dead; these men in possession; claiming ownership on the ground that they were the original discoverers, and had located the mine before the colonel ever came into the gulch; of course the claim was preposterous, but it was good enough to serve their purpose. The three bought the mine, and the scoundrels cleared out. The tongue of slander though is never quiet, and there were people in the camp rash enough to assert that the three men who bought the property were the men who hired the ruffians to jump it, and that the sale was all a sham."

"No doubt the statement was true!" Teton Tom observed.

"It was whispered about at the time, but as the new owners of the mine were known to be men of determination and not troubled by scruples, few cared to talk about the matter for fear of exciting their anger. At present they are in secure possession of the property."

"And now for the future!"

The old man cast a cautious glance around as though he feared there might be an eavesdropper near; there was not a soul in sight. He lowered his voice to a cautious whisper though, and said:

"I came of an old Scotch family, and have the gift of second sight. You understand what that is, I suppose?"

The young men nodded.

"I do not exercise that gift for the benefit of these miners; I tell their fortunes in the common way, by cards generally. But you understand, gentlemen, this second sight is something that the possessor cannot control; it does not come at will, but when it is least expected."

"During the last month, a half a dozen times at least I have had visions wherein the future was revealed. I saw you, colonel, with your friend here, make your appearance in the gulch, and watched you triumph over your enemies; it was not an easy triumph. The struggle was long and difficult, but in the end you succeeded; it will be a bloody fight though, for in my vision the faces of dead men glared at me."

"But I say, my friend, can you not see that you have made a mistake in calling me Randal Crawford? I am not a man of fifty-five or thereabouts, as Randal Crawford would be if he were in the land of the living, and then, according to your own story, Colonel Crawford was killed in the fight for the mine," Teton said.

The old man assumed a cunning look, and he nodded, wisely.

"Yes, yes, I understand all that; you look just about the same as you did when you were killed; your complexion is darker, but, of course, that is due to artifice; you have disguised yourself so you would not be recognized."

"You were mortally wounded in the fight, no doubt about that. I myself saw your body carried away by the flood in the creek, but the Lord has permitted you to return to earth again so you could avenge the cruel wrong that was done you. You have risen from the dead—not a day older than when you died, although twenty years have passed away. You are a messenger of vengeance, commissioned by the dread Lord of Hosts, and all the powers of darkness cannot prevail against you!"

The young men saw that the old fellow was undoubtedly out of his mind, and as they had obtained the information they wished, they gave him a dollar, which he was reluctant to take, and departed.

"What do you think of his story?" Burke asked, as they retraced their steps.

"I have no doubt that he has told the story



of the fight correctly enough. He is one of the old settlers, and the tale is familiar to him."

"How strange that he should declare you to be my father!"

"Oh, his wits are out of order, that is evident, and he has brooded over the matter until he was ready to accept the first stranger that inquired about the affair as a messenger of vengeance!" Teton Tom explained.

#### CHAPTER XIII.

##### A SURPRISE.

DURING the interview between the mayor and the marshal the lawyer had kept quiet, but after Anaconda George departed Finnegan remarked:

"Yez have been afther putting a bee in his bonnet; he will not be satisfied now until he has tried Teton Tom and found out of what he is made."

"That was what I was aiming at when I spoke," Crawford replied. "I did not want to say right out to him that I was anxious he should attack this stranger, but I talked in such a way as to be certain to rouse him to do it. The marshal is one of the big chiefs of the town, you know, and when another big chief appears it is his duty to climb him as soon as possible."

"Your plan succeeded to a charm; I could see from his face that he had made up his mind to pick a quarrel wid the man."

The mayor laughed and observed complacently that he "reckoned" he could pull the wires as well as anybody. Then the conversation turned upon other subjects, and the pair talked until the lawyer, happening to glance out of the window, saw the marshal returning.

"Here comes Anaconda now!" he exclaimed. "And from the look on his face I'll go bail that he hasn't been afther making a success of it."

"He doesn't show any marks of having been in a fight though," the mayor observed.

"That's true."

The entrance of Anaconda George ended the conversation.

"Wal, gen'lemen, I have slipped up on this hyer business in the worst kind of way," the marshal declared. "This cuss is the biggest kind of a chief! he's on the fight bigger'n a wolf! and don't you forget it!"

"You don't seem to have suffered much damage—I suppose that you have had a tussle with him," the mayor remarked.

"Jest a leetle wrastle, and he slammed me down in a way calculated to make a man think that a mountain had fallen onto him."

The face of the mayor grew dark; the failure of his scheme enraged him.

"This fellow is a warrior, then?" he observed.

"You kin bet yer bottom dollar he is," Anaconda George declared. "As good a man as ever struck this camp, bar none! And the man who kin git away with him need not be afraid to take a front seat anywhar in Montana."

"The fellow is deceptive; he doesn't look it," the mayor observed.

"You ar' right thar, sure as ye'r born!" Anaconda George asserted. "I reckoned I was jest going to have a walk-over, but it turned out to be a picnic for him instead of me."

"It is a most astonishing affair!" the mayor declared. "Why, I had so much confidence that you were by far the best man that, had I known there was going to be a contest between you, I would have been willing to bet two to one on your coming out ahead!"

"Wal, I reckon I would have given big odds myself, and gone every ducat that I could raise onto the thing," the marshal remarked. "But, as the sports say, I wasn't in it at all."

"Bad 'cess to the fellow! it's a wonder he is!" exclaimed the lawyer.

"You never said a truer word in your life!" Anaconda George asserted. "But I say, gen'lemen, I don't want this hyer thing to go any further. I have jest let out the honest truth 'bout the skirmish, but I don't want it known all over the camp, 'cos' it would give the boys the opportunity to git the grand laugh on me, and wouldn't do me no good, nohow!"

"Oh, that is all right; you can depend upon it that neither Finnegan nor I will say anything about it," the mayor replied. "But this sport, though, will be apt to let it out, for it will be quite a feather in his cap to be able to boast that he got the best of a man like yourself."

"Oh, yes, the spalpeen will be sure to be afther making a great brag about it!" the lawyer declared.

"Wal, I ain't so sure 'bout that," the marshal replied. "From w'ot I have seen of the galoot I should say that he wasn't much given to blowing his own horn. When I went in for to pick a fuss with him, he kinder insinuated in a quiet way that I had made a mistake, and he would have some fun with me, and, blame me! if he didn't. But I don't reckon that he will go and blow 'round town about it."

"Maybe not, but most men would. How about the old idiot—did you see him?" the mayor asked, abruptly.

"Oh, yes, and I told him I reckoned it was about time that he got out of town, and that is what made the fuss 'tween me and this Teton

Tom, 'cos' he allowed that I hadn't ought to drive the old cuss away, and as I got the worst of the fight, arter it was over I allowed that p'haps I had been a leetle hasty."

"Oh, it doesn't really make any difference whether the old idiot goes or stays," the mayor declared, endeavoring to appear unconcerned. "So we will not say anything more about it. But in regard to your tussle with this sharp, you can depend upon Finnegan and myself to keep the matter quiet."

"Much obleeged! I will do as much for you one of these days," and then Anaconda George took his departure.

Both the mayor and the Irishman brooded over the matter for a few moments, and then Crawford exclaimed:

"This man is going to prove more dangerous even than I expected!"

"True for yez! it's a foine fighter he is!"

"By this time he is probably in possession of all the facts regarding the fight for the mine, for Dunb Dickey being one of the old settlers, will be apt to know the story."

"Yis, he has been 'round the camp, off and on, for the last tin years."

"Longer than that. I was talking with a man from Saint Peter's mission, and he said he remembered the old man for nearly twenty years. The Catholic priest at Saint Peter's heard that there was a whiteman kept prisoner by the Crow Indians, and he looked into the matter; it was this old man, but he was not a prisoner; being crazy the Indians looked upon him as a great medicine-man and treated him well. The red-skins either couldn't, or wouldn't, tell anything about how he came to lose his wits. All they knew, they declared, was that he had come to their camp one day, asked for food, and remained there. It was generally believed, though, that he was the survivor of some emigrant party who had been attacked and killed by the Indians."

"Yis, and he wint crazy from his injuries."

"Exactly; and that is his story undoubtedly. But, to return to our mutton, I don't care a snap of my finger about the old fraud now that the story of the mine is told, but I don't intend that this strange sport shall lord it over the town. A new idea has come into my mind; see what you think of it!"

And as the mayor finished his explanation, the two pards came down the gulch.

"Aha, there he is now!" Finnegan exclaimed.

"Yes, and as soon as he is out of the way, I must be off!" Crawford cried.

We will now follow the two friends.

They went directly to the hotel, discussing the situation as they went along.

The first point they decided was to find out who now held an interest in the Black Snake Mine.

"We must pursue our investigations cautiously," Teton Tom remarked, "for I am convinced that the scoundrels are on the alert. In some mysterious way the fact of our quest has leaked out, or it may be that the rascals are acting on suspicion alone, the fact of our inquiring about the past having alarmed them."

In the hotel the two sat down at a table and took up newspapers, hoping to get into conversation with their neighbors so as to learn what they wished to know.

But it was not until after dinner that an opportunity came, and then, while engaged in conversation with a genial stranger, into the saloon marched a file of soldiers.

"You are Teton Tom?" said the sergeant in command of the squad, as he approached the pards.

"That is my name."

"Then you are my prisoner!"

There was a tableau of astonishment.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

##### ON THE ROAD.

THERE were a half-dozen loungers in the saloon, besides the two pards, at the time when the soldiers made their appearance, and the words of the sergeant excited general wonder.

The two most astonished men were Teton Tom and Burke.

"Eh, what is that you say?" Teton Tom exclaimed, fancying that the soldier had made some stupid blunder.

"Your name is Teton Tom?"

"Yes."

"Then you are my prisoner!" the sergeant exclaimed.

"You arrest me?"

"Those are my orders."

"But upon what charge?"

"That is more than I know, sir. I am a soldier, and it is my duty to obey orders without asking questions," the sergeant replied. "I was told to take a file of men and arrest one Teton Tom, whom I would be apt to find at the hotel, and that is all I know about it."

"There must be some mistake!" the adventurer declared.

"Well, as to that, of course, I couldn't say. I was ordered to arrest you."

"Who gave the order?"

"Major Cadwalader, who is in command of Fort Fremont."

"I don't see what the deuce the major has got to do with me!" Teton Tom exclaimed. "I am a private citizen and do not come under military laws!"

"I know just as little about it as you do, sir. All I know is that I must obey my orders."

"Of course, I understand that. There must be some mistake about the matter, and I am not at all afraid to face the music, for I am not guilty of any offense which would bring me under the ban of the law, either civil or military," Teton Tom remarked, rising as he spoke. "I am ready to go with you. May I inquire where I am to be taken?"

"To Fort Fremont."

"Will there be any objection to my accompanying my friend?" Burke asked.

"None that I know of—it is a free country," the sergeant replied.

At this point Barney Finnegan, who was present, taking a drink with a friend at the bar, came forward.

"You'll excuse me, sor," he said, with an elaborate bow to Teton Tom, "if I take the liberty of sp'aking a word in this case. I am a lawyer, and as ye seem to have gotten into a wee bit of a hobble here, maybe I can be of use to yez."

Teton Tom cast a quick glance at the man, and although Finnegan had a smooth, agreeable manner, yet the adventurer formed an unfavorable impression.

"Well, I don't know about that," Teton Tom remarked. "I reckon the trouble will not amount to much, for it is my impression that there is some mistake about the matter."

"It is always the wisest plan to be represented by counsel, do ye mind! I shall be p'ased to act as yer legal adviser, and if I do yez no good I'll make no charge."

"That is fair enough," the adventurer replied. "I don't think I will need your services, yet if you want to try what you can do, I am agreeable."

"Of coorse, that is where yer head is level!" the Irishman exclaimed. "Sergeant, darlint, are ye afther executing a warrant or anything of the kind?"

"No, just verbal orders. The major said:

"Take a squad of men, go to the town, hunt up a man called Teton Tom and arrest him. You will probably find him at the Golden Star Hotel."

"Ah, yis, I see; and that was all?"

"Yes, that's all."

"It is jist the military way of doing it," the lawyer remarked. "I will go wid yez to the fort; the major is an old frind of mine, and ye needn't be afeard but what you'll get justice at his hands. He has a rough way wid him, like many an ould military man, but his heart is all right."

"Oh, I am not at all alarmed. There isn't any reason why I should be troubled, and so my mind is easy," Teton Tom remarked.

"That is right, me boy! always keep a stiff upper lip! Be aisy, and if ye can't be aisy, be as aisy as ye can!"

Then Teton Tom fell in between the soldiers and away they went, the lawyer and Burke bringing up the rear.

Fort Fremont, the military post commanded by the grim old martinet, Major Roland Cadwalader, was two miles down the creek from Bearfoot Bar.

Though called a fort, it was by courtesy only, for there was nothing of a fort about it, being only a simple military post.

As the party proceeded down the trail, the lawyer opened a conversation with Burke. As the two were a little distance behind the rest, they could speak without danger of being overheard.

"Faix! if there was only a little law in the camp, I would be afther t'aching these military spalpeens a lesson!" the Irishman declared. "It is monstrous! the idea of arresting a man wid-out so much as a bit of paper! Aha! if there was only a judge handy that I could be afther getting at, how soon I would have a few legal documents that would not only take the prisoner away from these sodgers, but bring the major into court to answer to a charge of false imprisonment. But, you see, the major knows that there's no law in this region that a man can get at, and that is why he dares to carry matters wid a high hand."

"Yes, I understand, but this is some blunder; Tom hasn't offended against the law in any way," Burke remarked.

"Have you been wid him ever since he kim into this region?"

"Yes, I met him in Chicago and we started West together, and have not separated since we started."

This was the story which had been arranged between the two that each was to tell when questioned.

"And he's had no trouble with the military anywhere?"

"Not a bit! Why, this is the first place that we have come in contact with them."

"Well, now, upon me would if this isn't one of the qu'arest cases that I iver heard of in all



me legal experience!" the lawyer declared. "I think you must be right—it's some big blunder."

"Yes, some mistake, evidently."

"Ye'r' jist looking around, like, other young min—looking for a place where there'll be some chance for ye to make money?"

"That is our game!"

"Be the powers! this is a mystery!" Finnegan declared. "I wonder what has been afther biting Major Cadwalader to make him sind his sodgers on this wild-goose chase?"

The solution of the mystery was near at hand, for the party were now within sight of the low, white-washed buildings of Fort Fremont.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE ACCUSATION.

THE prisoner was conveyed at once to the presence of Major Cadwalader, who sat behind a desk in the main room of the largest building of the group.

The major was a man of fifty-five or sixty, with a commanding figure and the head of a determined fighter. He had iron-gray hair and a short, bristle-like beard of the same hue; a fine type of the overbearing military martinet.

There were three other officers in the room, one of whom was the captain who had been present with Miss Cadwalader at the time when the adventurer had the fight with Diamond Joe and Crooked Smith.

The prisoner was ushered into the apartment, the lawyer and Burke following after the soldiers.

The major cast a stern, inquisitive sort of a glance from under his bushy eyebrows at the civilians, and it was plain from the expression upon his face that he was not pleased at their presence.

The Irishman though did not seem to notice that the soldier was glancing at them in anything but a welcoming way, and he nodded to him in the most friendly manner.

"How are ye, major? It is delighted I am to see yez. This gentleman here, Mr. Teton, is a friend of mine, and so I kim wid him to see if I couldn't be afther helping him in this little scrape."

"How do you do, Mr. Finnegan?" responded the major, coldly. "It is natural, of course, that you should wish to help your friend, but I am afraid that you will not be able to be of much service, for this case comes under military rules."

"Ah, yis, I see, and ye don't want black-coats mixed up wid yer blue wans?"

"That is the point," the major replied. "We military men go straight for justice and don't trouble ourselves much about law."

And then he bent his keen eyes full on the face of Teton Tom, who bore the scrutiny without flinching.

"Humph! your name is Teton Tom?" the soldier exclaimed, in a harsh, overbearing way.

"Thomas Teton, rightly," the adventurer responded.

"An assumed name, of course," was the major's comment. "What is your right one?"

"Thomas Teton is all the handle that I possess."

"Harkye, young man, you had better speak the truth!" the major exclaimed, sternly. "You will find that it will be a great deal better for you in the long run."

"Why do you jump to the conclusion that I am not speaking the truth—as you have, evidently?" Teton Tom asked, not in the least awed by the threatening manner of the soldier.

"Look you, sir, it is my privilege to question and your duty to answer!" the major retorted.

"Oh, come now, don't put it that way, for I will not have it!" Teton Tom exclaimed. "You have arrested me, and I did not attempt to make any resistance, although you have no more right to arrest me without a warrant, and by due process of law, than I have to get together a party of my friends and arrest you. But when you come to talk about it being my duty to answer, you are putting it on a little too strong."

"We will soon see about that!" the major cried, harshly. "And I warn you in advance that you had better keep a civil tongue in your head or it will be the worse for you!"

"And I warn you that I am a free American citizen, and one who will not stand any nonsense!" Teton Tom exclaimed, in bold defiance. "Because you happen to be an officer of the army gives you no right to trample on me, and so I warn you to go slow, for I shall hold you to a personal account for any insult that you may offer to me."

The face of the soldier grew white with rage at being thus addressed.

"You had better put a bridle on that insolent tongue of yours!" he exclaimed, hotly. "If you are not careful, it will get you into serious trouble. I am not a man to allow myself to be bullied, and I tell you that if you do not adopt a different tone, it will go hard with you!"

"Oh, nonsense!" exclaimed the adventurer; "you cannot frighten me, and you are only

wasting your breath in attempting it. You may be a great man in a military way—a high and mighty satrap—but that does not make any difference to me. I reckon that it is not war times at present; this district is not under martial law, and you have no more business to interfere with me than any ordinary man, even if you are the major in command of the fort."

Cadwalader was in a fearful rage; naturally impetuous and overbearing, he was inclined to lord it over all with whom he came in contact, and this plain speaking so irritated him that it was only by a violent effort he restrained himself from an outburst of passion; but holding his rage in check, he said:

"Perhaps, my man, you will change your tune when you find out the nature of the charge which has been brought against you!" and he frowned in an ominous way.

"Oh, no, I shall not!" Teton Tom replied, immediately. "It does not matter the wag of a sheep's tail to me what the accusation is, for I know that I have not been guilty of any crime. But, I say, will you excuse me if I remark that we are losing time in talking," the adventurer continued. "We had better get right down to business as soon as possible. If your idea is to scare me I can tell you that the game will not work. No man on earth can bluff me, and you are only wasting words."

"I would not say too much if I were you!" the soldier retorted. "You may have reason to be sorry for it hereafter."

"Oh, no; a man is never sorry for taking a bold stand when he knows that he is in the right," Teton Tom replied, stoutly.

By this time the major's heat had cooled a little; he saw that there was nothing to be gained by bandying words with the prisoner. It was a game in which "Jack was as good as his master," so he proceeded to business.

"The accusation which has been brought against you is a pretty serious one," the major remarked, "and if you cannot disprove it—and it certainly seems to me as if there was no possibility of your doing so—it will go hard with you."

A smile appeared on Teton Tom's face, and he shook his head.

"Go ahead! let me know the accusation; I cannot attempt to disprove the charge until I know what it is."

"You are accused of being a deserter from the United States Army!" exclaimed Major Cadwalader, sternly.

A look of amazement appeared on the faces of the listeners, for the announcement took them all by surprise.

"Oh, this is absurd!" Teton Tom cried. "I never had anything to do with the United States Army in my life!"

"Look you, sir, you cannot deceive an old military man like myself!" the major exclaimed. "I can plainly see from your erect carriage and the way you handle yourself that you have smelt powder!"

"Yes, that is the truth, I have seen service, but not in this country."

"Exactly! and if you are the man you are accused of being that fills the bill."

"Does it? well, I am not the man, I reckon."

"Your name is Robert Raymond, you enlisted in the city of Chicago about a year ago, stating that you were a deserter from the English force in Canada; with twenty others, you were transferred to this post, and deserted on the second day after you arrived here."

"Oh, no, I am not the man!" Teton Tom declared. "I never was in Canada in my life, and never enlisted in the United States Army. I should think that you would be able to see from my appearance that I am not an Englishman."

"Neither was this Robert Raymond. He was a Canadian half-breed and just such a man as you are," the major replied. "As it happened I was absent from the post at the time that this man arrived, so I did not see him, therefore I have no personal knowledge of the matter. If I had ever set eyes on you I would be able to tell in a moment whether you were the man or not. Unfortunately for you though some of the men who were in the same squad as yourself are still here and they can identify you."

"I reckon that when they come to take a good look at me they will see that I am not the man," Teton Tom exclaimed, confidently.

"Well, I hope for your sake that it will prove to be as you say, for I can tell you that it will go hard with you if you are identified as this Robert Raymond, for Colonel MacLane, who is now in command of Fort Logan, and to whose care you will be committed for trial if you are proved to be the man, has a perfect hatred for deserters, and the chances are great that your punishment will be a severe one."

"Your words have no terrors for me, for I am not the man."

"Send in one of the witnesses," commanded the major.

The man made his appearance, a soldier who answered to the name of Richard Biglan, an ill-looking fellow, and he swore without the least hesitation that Teton Tom was the deserter, Robert Raymond.

A second soldier, one William Thompson, another hangdog-looking rascal, testified to the same effect.

Teton Tom did not seem to be disturbed by this, merely saying:

"The men have made a mistake, as will be proven when I come to have a regular trial."

"For your sake I hope so, but I will have to hold you, and as soon as possible I will send you to Fort Logan."

Then, by the major's orders, Teton Tom was conveyed to the guard-house.

Burke and the lawyer returned to the town after taking leave of the adventurer.

"Don't ye worry!" the Irishman exclaimed, at parting. "I'll go over to Fort Logan. It's a big friend the colonel is of mine, and I'll get ye off!"

## CHAPTER XVI.

### ANOTHER WITNESS.

THE news of the arrest of Teton Tom created a deal of excitement in the town, and it was the general subject of conversation, and although at first the citizens were inclined to think that the accusation did not amount to anything, yet, after Finnegan related all the particulars of the arrest and, with owl-like gravity, shaking his head, had declared the sport to be in a bad box, but that he was going to do all he could to get him out of it public opinion began to veer around.

The landlord of the Golden Star Hotel too was inclined to think that the soldiers had got the right man.

He professed to have seen Robert Raymond once, and declared that the sport strongly resembled the deserter if he was not the man.

Archibald Crawford also remembered the half-breed soldier, and he said Teton Tom looked a great deal like him, and the opinion of these three leading men of the camp had great influence.

Burke, young and enthusiastic, had believed that he could enlist the citizens in the cause of his friend so that a pressure might be brought to bear upon Major Cadwalader, but he soon saw that the miners were not disposed to interfere in any way; this was principally due to the words of the three men before mentioned, although the landlord had taken an opportunity to assure the young man—speaking at a time when there were no listeners about—that he considered the arrest to be a high-handed piece of business, and he thought the citizens ought to have something to say about the matter, that is, if there was a doubt as to Teton Tom being the man, and then he proceeded to cross-examine Burke as to what he knew about the adventurer.

Skillfully and carefully as the landlord proceeded in this "pumping" operation, yet Burke was not deceived, and soon comprehended what he was after, and thus, being on his guard, the host did not succeed in learning anything beyond what he already knew.

"Then you don't know anything about your pard's past life?" the landlord said, after Burke had related the story which had been agreed upon between himself and Teton Tom.

"No; but there isn't any doubt in my mind that he is just what he represents himself to be."

"Mebbe so; but I am afeard he will have a hard job to git out of this scrape," the landlord remarked, with a dubious shake of the head. "According to what Finnegan says, these two soldiers swear positively that he is the man, and it 'pears to me that these military cusses ginerally shoot deserters, don't they?"

"In time of war I believe they do, but I hardly think they punish the offense so severely now."

"Wa-al, anyhow, I wouldn't like to be in his place," the host declared.

It did not take Burke long to see that he could not hope to do anything with the citizens.

They were sorry for Teton Tom, hoped he would get out of the scrape, but, with the exception of the lawyer, no one seemed at all inclined to do anything to help the accused man.

Finnegan, on the contrary, was loud in his protestations of what he would do, and he too tried the landlord's game of pumping Burke, but as the young man was on the watch the Irishman only had his labor for his pains.

One point Burke was acute enough to notice. The lawyer did not seem to go at all upon the idea that Teton Tom was not the deserter; on the contrary, he seemed to be satisfied that the military had got hold of the right man, and his whole idea was to get him off with a light punishment by using his personal influence with Colonel MacLane.

"By Jove!" exclaimed the young man at last, in disgust; "as far as I can see there is no way in which I can be of the least possible use to my pard! He has got into this hole on my account, and yet I am not able to do anything to help him out."

Probably the person who was most astonished by the accusation brought against Teton Tom was the major's daughter, the dashing Katherine Cadwalader.

After the sport was taken to the guard-house, Captain Morgan went over to the major's quar-



ters for the express purpose of telling Miss Katherine about the affair.

The captain had been paying devoted attention to the major's daughter for some time, and he did not like the interest which the brilliant girl had taken in the stranger.

"It will rather astonish her, I fancy, when she finds that the fellow is a deserter and is now securely laid by the heels!" he exclaimed, in high glee, as he proceeded across the parade-ground.

The girl received the officer in her usual gracious way, and as he anticipated, she was amazed at the recital.

"Oh, it is utter nonsense!" she exclaimed. "This man is not Robert Raymond!"

"What do you know about the matter?" asked Captain Morgan, surprised at this declaration.

"Why, I was here at the time the recruits came and saw the squad."

"Ah, yes," and the captain was now angry enough that he had been so foolish as to speak about the matter, but he had never for an instant supposed that she knew anything of the deserter.

"I remember the arrival of the men distinctly, and it was about as poor a squad of fellows as I ever saw!" the girl declared. "There was hardly a good man in the party. Nearly all of them are gone, some deserted, three or four were drummed out of the army for drunkenness, and those who did stick are in the guard-house about half the time. Two of the men are here now, Biglan and Thompson, and they are more trouble than any other two soldiers in the command."

"It is those two men who have identified this Teton Tom as being their former comrade, Robert Raymond."

"I would not believe either one of the rascals under oath!" the girl exclaimed.

"They are a couple of bad eggs—there is no mistake about that," Captain Morgan admitted. "Still, in this case, I do not see what the men can gain by lying about the matter. If this fellow is not Robert Raymond, the deserter, why should they say he is?"

"Oh, I don't know; I am not acquainted with any of the facts in the case," Katherine answered. "There may be some reason for it, and my opinion of those two men is so poor, that I really believe either one of them would swear a man's life away if there was five dollars to be gained by so doing."

"Ah, now you are a little too hard on the men!"

"Not a bit! two worthless scoundrels!" the girl declared, emphatically. "Both of them ought to have been drummed out of the service long ago, for they are a disgrace to the army."

The captain did not attempt to argue the point, for he knew that the girl was right in regard to the character of the two men.

"It is lucky you saw the man, for if this fellow is not the deserter, you will be able to bear witness to that effect."

"Oh, I feel perfectly sure that he is not one of those recruits, yet I am not positive I should be able to identify the right man if I came across him, for I never took much notice of the men."

"Yet you are certain that this Teton Tom is not the deserter?"

"Yes, yes, he is such an odd-looking man that I should be certain to remember him if I had ever seen him."

"Oh, he has changed, of course," the captain explained. "He would not be fool enough to come back here if he had not. But I say, Miss Katherine, don't you think that you are a little hasty in declaring that you are sure this is not Raymond when you admit that you do not feel positive that you would recognize the deserter if you saw him?"

"Oh, no!" the girl declared positively.

The major coming in at that moment put a stop to the conversation and the captain departed.

Katherine immediately spoke to her father in regard to the matter, but she found the veteran firm in the belief that the soldiers were correct in saying that the adventurer was the deserter.

"You must take into consideration the fact that you only saw the fellow a few times, and, of course, you would not be apt to take any particular notice of him, while these men were his boon companions," Major Cadwalader urged. "Besides, this fellow is disguised now. Both Biglan and Thompson say that he has stained his face so that he appears to be a great deal darker in complexion than he really is, and then he has allowed his hair to grow, and so managed to disguise himself pretty well."

"I cannot bring myself to believe that he is the man!" Katherine exclaimed. "There was not one of those recruits who looked at all like him!"

"Well, if he is not Raymond it will be easy for him to show who he is. He can give an account of himself," the major remarked. "Tell what business he has been engaged in, and where. If he is not the deserter it will not be difficult for him to prove it. When I ques-

tioned him he stuck to it that his name was Teton Tom, although that is absurd on the face of it."

"Suppose I go and see him, father!" the girl exclaimed, abruptly. "I have an idea he will tell the truth!"

"All right! I have no objection. If he has any secret we will not betray him. Let the man speak out and free himself, if he can."

"Is he in close confinement?"

"Yes, I will give you an order to see him."

Ten minutes later Katherine was on her way to the guard-house.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### IN THE GUARD-HOUSE.

The guard-house was a small, one-storied building, situated on the extreme right of the plateau upon which the post was placed.

It was strongly constructed, the door strengthened by massive cross-pieces, and the one small window which gave light to the interior was guarded by stout iron bars.

A sentinel paced his beat without; both door and window were on the same side of the building, the one which faced the parade-ground, around which the buildings of the post were placed, forming a hollow square.

All the furniture the room could boast was half a dozen home-made stools.

Around the room on three sides a broad shelf extended, and this was the "bunks" of the prisoners, the only bedclothing allowed them being a few army blankets.

The sergeant in command of the squad which conducted Teton Tom to his place of confinement noticed that the prisoner cast an inquiring glance around as he entered the room, and so felt called upon to remark:

"This ain't no first-class hotel, you know, and in here the fattest man has the softest bed."

"Oh, the accommodations do not worry me any," Teton Tom replied. "I am used to roughing it and can sleep as soundly on the ground, or on the soft side of a hard plank, as in the nicest kind of a bed."

"That is lucky," the sergeant observed, "for a man who was not used to hard fare would have a tough time of it here."

"I reckon I will survive it."

Then the soldiers departed, leaving the prisoner to his meditations.

He sat down by the window so he could command a view of the parade-ground, and fell to musing upon the situation.

"This was an extremely well-planned scheme," he soliloquized. "That is, well planned as far as my arrest on this accusation goes, but for the life of me I don't see how they are going to carry it out."

"It was easy enough to have me arrested—not a difficult matter to induce such rascals as the two fellows who testified against me to swear to about anything."

"They were hired to swear that I was this deserter, of course. There is no reason why they should think I am the man without some one paid them to think so, for it is hardly within the bounds of possibility that I can be so like him that these men really think I am this Robert Raymond."

"Oh, no! that verges too much on the improbable to be accepted!"

"Both these men are reckless scoundrels, if their faces indicate their characters, and I think it would not take much money to induce them to swear to almost anything."

"So far the game has worked beautifully. I am in duress vile, and the next move will be to send me to Fort Logan to be tried."

"Now the question is, do the men who planned this affair really believe that I will not be able to prove that I am not the deserter when I come to have a regular trial at Fort Logan?"

"It does not seem possible!" the adventurer exclaimed, after meditating over the matter for a moment. "The odds are a hundred to one that I can prove I am not the man, and the men who are at the bottom of this thing are able to calculate the chances just as closely as myself."

"Then the game must be to keep me locked up here, so that they will have time to prepare another stroke. I must be on my guard, then."

The meditations of Teton Tom at this point were cut short by his catching sight of the dashing Katherine Cadwalader crossing the parade ground, coming directly toward the guard-house, and the thought at once came to the prisoner that she intended to pay him a visit.

She sought the sergeant in his quarters, gave up her pass, and was by him conducted to the guard-house.

Teton Tom rose as Miss Cadwalader entered, and bowed in return to the lady's nod.

"I could not refrain from coming to see you in regard to this absurd charge which has been brought against you," she remarked.

"Well, I am glad that there is some one who does not believe the accusation to be a true one!" Teton Tom replied. "Excuse my remissness—allow me to offer you a seat," and the adventurer brought a stool, upon which Miss Cad-

walader seated herself, and then he resumed his former position.

"Oh, no, I am certain you are not the deserter!" the lady declared, in the most positive manner. "For I saw the man when he came to the fort with the rest of the recruits, and I am as sure as I can be of anything that you are not this Robert Raymond."

"Well, I am certain of it, of course, but the difficulty will be for me to prove it, for I am a stranger here, and so am not able to bring forward anybody to identify me. If I was an old resident now there would not be any trouble in disproving the testimony of the two soldiers, who swear in the most positive manner that I am the deserter."

"Both the men who have sworn against you—Biglan and Thompson—are arrant rascals—a disgrace to the uniform they wear, and I honestly believe that ten dollars would induce either one of the two to swear to almost anything!" the girl declared.

"Well, I was rather inclined to that impression myself. If the characters of men can be judged by their faces, both these fellows are hard cases."

"That is the truth! They are in the guard-house about half the time."

"But, I say, Miss Cadwalader, if these men are not honest about the matter—if they are not swearing that I am the deserter because they really believe that I am, why do they take this action?"

"Oh, I haven't the remotest idea!" Katherine answered.

"Of course there is a reason for it."

"Have you had any trouble with these men?"

"No, I never saw either of them until they confronted me on my examination."

"I have it!" Miss Cadwalader exclaimed, abruptly. "A solution of the mystery has just occurred to me. These soldiers may be friends of the ruffians whom you defeated, and they have sworn that you were the deserter in order to get even with you."

"That may be possible; yet it seems to me that such a scheme is a little too deep for any common fellows to go into."

"It is the only explanation as far as I can see," the girl observed, thoughtfully. "There must be some motive of this kind, or else these men would never have troubled their heads about the matter. If you were really the deserter, who was an old chum of theirs, for all three came to the post in company, they would be much more apt to swear they had never seen you than to betray the secret."

"No doubt about that. It is not through any desire to see justice done that these fellows have sworn against me. It is a plot, of course; there is no doubt in regard to that in my mind, but I am puzzled to guess who is at the back of it."

"Have you had any trouble with any one in the camp besides the two whom I saw you conquer?"

"No, nothing to speak of," Teton Tom replied. "The town marshal and I had a little trial of strength and skill. He imagined that he was a great wrestler, and I succeeded in convincing him that he was not as expert as he believed; but he took his defeat in a good spirit, expressed himself as being satisfied, and I don't honestly think the man harbors any ill-will toward me on account of the affair."

"It must be then those men whom you defeated."

"I am doubtful about that. It has seemed to me, right from the beginning of that affair, that those two were set on to attack me, for there was no reason why there should have been any trouble."

"But as you were a stranger in the camp, how could such a thing be, unless, indeed, you have some old enemies here?" Katherine asked, in astonishment.

"No; there is not a soul in the town whom I have ever encountered before to my knowledge."

"It certainly is very strange."

"Yes, it is; and then this second attack makes it look as if somebody is making a dead set at me, and without the slightest reason so far as I can see."

"It certainly is an extremely strange affair," Miss Cadwalader admitted. "I had a conversation with my father in regard to your case," she continued. "I told him that I felt sure you were not the man, but the direct way in which the soldiers swore that you were had an influence on him, particularly as I was obliged to admit that, though you were not Robert Raymond, yet I did not believe I would be able to identify Raymond if I saw him; but he said if you were not the deserter you would be able to show it by giving a full account of yourself—what business brought you here and what you intended to do. Of course, if you intrust your secrets to my father you can rely upon his discretion."

"Yes, certainly," Teton Tom remarked, with a peculiar look in his eyes, but the girl did not notice it.

"This was why I called upon you," Katherine said, rising. "If you explain matters to my father I feel sure you will not have to go to Fort Logan."



"I am a thousand times obliged to you!" Teton Tom exclaimed.

"Oh, don't mention it," she replied. "I am only doing what I know to be right."

After the girl departed, Teton Tom watched her as she retraced her steps across the parade-ground.

"The major is inquisitive," the adventurer mused. "Is he too one of the gang? I hope not for his daughter's sake."

#### CHAPTER XVIII.

##### THE MAJOR MAKES A DISCOVERY.

KATHERINE CADWALADER went straight to her father, and to him related the particulars of her interview with Teton Tom.

The major listened attentively.

"It seems to me, Katherine, that you are taking a deal of interest in this fellow," he observed.

"Because I am satisfied that he is not the man he is supposed to be," she replied, promptly.

"Why does he not speak then and tell who he is?"

"I think that if you saw him, father, he would be willing to satisfy you."

"Well, I will have a talk with him and see what he has to say for himself."

Major Cadwalader was as good as his word, and about an hour afterward visited Teton Tom in the guard-house.

"I thought I would drop in and have a little talk with you," the major remarked.

"Always pleased to receive visitors, although I cannot boast of very comfortable quarters at present," the adventurer observed.

Teton Tom had been seated by the window, but had risen at the major's entrance.

"Sit down," said the soldier, taking a seat as he spoke.

Teton Tom resumed his place by the window.

"My daughter is so positive there has been a mistake in this matter that it induces me to give you another hearing before sending you to Fort Logan," the major explained.

"I am very much obliged to the lady for the interest which she has taken in my case. Of course I know that it is a mistake and that I am not the man, but in the face of the fact of these two soldiers swearing so positively that I am it is not strange that my unsupported word should be doubted."

"Well, I have been reflecting upon the matter. I have a great deal of confidence in my daughter's judgment, and as she is so earnest about the affair, being sure that you are not the deserter, the idea came to me that if I were to come and see you, possibly you would be willing to give a statement in regard to yourself which would satisfy me that the two soldiers were mistaken in swearing that you were Raymond."

"I can understand, of course, that there may be reasons why you should not want to speak in an open court in the presence of witnesses, but here we are alone, and you can depend upon my discretion. You need not fear to speak freely, for any secret you may intrust to my care will be sacredly kept."

"Oh, I have no fears in regard to that," Teton Tom replied. "You are an officer of the United States Army, and a man in your position should be a gentleman and an honest man, and such a one ought to be capable of keeping any secret intrusted to his care."

"Exactly! it is as I said; you need not fear to intrust me with your secret!" the major declared.

"Yes, but I really have not got any secret," Teton Tom replied. "If I had I should not hesitate a moment in revealing it."

The expression upon the face of the major showed that he did not credit this statement, and he hesitated for a moment before he spoke.

"Of course it is only natural for you to wish to keep your business to yourself," the soldier said at last. "And under ordinary circumstances I should not blame you for being cautious, but it seems to me that when a man finds himself in as bad a box as you are at present he would be very foolish not to do anything he could to get out of it."

"That is true enough; no doubt about that, and I assure you, major, I would not be slow to avail myself of any chance that offered," Teton Tom declared.

"Why not confide in me, then?" the soldier urged. "Tell me, frankly, who you are and why you came to this camp. You had some reason in coming, of course. A man does not go ahead blindly in such a matter."

"That is certainly correct, but there isn't any secret, and why you should imagine that I am anything but what I appear to be is a mystery to me."

From the commencement of the interview Major Cadwalader had been studying the face of the prisoner intently, and the impression came to him that at some time in the remote past he had either seen Teton Tom, or some one whom he closely resembled.

The major's mind went back to the past the moment he came to this conclusion. Had he, indeed, met the prisoner at some distant period, or was it but a chance resemblance to somebody else?

This question was a difficult one for him to

answer, and the more he puzzled over it the more perplexed he became.

His face, though, gave no indication of his perplexity, for long years of experience had taught him to veil his feelings with the cold mask of indifference.

He replied after a short pause to Teton Tom's speech.

"Well, I will say to you frankly that the name which you claim does not seem to me to be a real one."

"In reality it is Thomas Teton, but after the fashion of the West, it has been transposed. I have been a scout and mountain-man, and my pals choose to consider Teton Tom a much better handle than Thomas Teton."

"Yes, I can readily understand how that could happen, but the name itself is an uncommon one. Teton is not the name of a man, but that of a river."

"That is correct, and it was the river gave me my name, for I was born on its banks."

"Why do you not bear the name of your father?"

"Simply because all the name my father was known by was White Crow. He was a white man who married a Crow squaw, and became an adopted son of that nation, but what his right name was is a mystery."

"You are really a half-breed, then?" the major questioned, in a tone which expressed considerable doubt.

"Oh, yes; can't you see that by the color of my skin?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, it was my idea that you were in disguise, and your dark color from some dye which you had applied to your face and hands," the major declared.

"Oh, no, my color is a natural one, and for proof, look!"

Teton Tom opened his shirt in front, exposing the skin beneath.

"You can see for yourself that I am a half-breed, and though the color of my breast is not as dark as that of my face, it is because the one is not exposed to the sun as is the other."

The major was more puzzled now than ever, for he had gone upon the assumption that Teton Tom was not a half-breed, but now it was certain he was, the soldier's bewilderment increased.

"I see I was wrong in my belief," he admitted.

"As you are in your idea that there is any secret connected with me. The story of my life is a simple one, and is soon told. I was born, as I told you, on the banks of the Teton River, brought up among the Crow Indians, and then carried to Europe by a showman, where I remained for some time, but getting tired of the life, I became a soldier in the Turkish Army, and fought through the war with Russia. When that ended, I drifted back to America, came out here to my Western birthplace, where I became a mountain-man."

The story seemed like truth, and the major could see no flaw in it.

"How did you happen to come to Bearfoot Bar, and where did you encounter this pard of yours—this Burke?"

"I met him in Chicago; he was a tenderfoot on his way to Montana, where he proposed to invest in a mine, and as he was not posted in regard to the country he made me an offer to go in with him, and we came up to this district because we heard this region was enjoying a boom."

"Your story is a plausible one, and if you had some witnesses now to support it you would not have any trouble in getting out of this scrape," the major observed.

"Yes, that is just where the shoe pinches!" Teton Tom replied. "I am a stranger here and don't know a soul in the town, so it is impossible for me to bring forward any witnesses."

"That is unfortunate," the major remarked, still intently studying the face of the other and striving to remember where he had seen one like it.

And now, all of a sudden, the recollection came to him, and it was as much as he could do to refrain from a start.

Teton Tom noticed that the expression upon the face of the major changed, and wondered at it.

"Well," the soldier remarked, after quite a pause, "I suppose I will have to send you to Fort Logan, but I will do what I can for you on your trial," and then he rose to depart.

"Much obliged," said Teton Tom, "but I am not at all worried."

"Oh, I guess you will come out all right," and the major quitted the guard-house.

"The resemblance is wonderful," the soldier muttered, as he returned to his quarters. "No wonder I was told to note his face and see if it did not recall memories of the past. But he is in a trap now, and he will be a lucky fellow indeed if he escapes from it."

#### CHAPTER XIX.

##### A HARD CUSTOMER.

"THE MAJOR is taking a great deal of interest in my case," Teton Tom observed, with a quiet

smile. "Why does he trouble himself about the matter? Is it possible that he is in league with the men who have been attacking me ever since I struck the town? Was he one of the original gang which stole the Black Snake Mine from Colonel Randal Crawford? It seems unlikely; still, more unlikely things than that have happened. One thing is sure, though: if the major came for information, he did not succeed in gaining any."

Then the adventurer fell into a fit of meditation, from which he was aroused by the arrival of another prisoner—an ugly-looking soldier, considerably the worse for liquor.

He evinced a disposition to fight the guard, and undoubtedly would have done so had he not been outnumbered six to one.

As it was, he swore at them in the most fluent manner, and made all sorts of threats as to the vengeance he would take upon each individual member of the guard, from the sergeant downward, when he got his liberty again.

"You had better hush your talk!" cried Sergeant Kelly, angrily. "You needn't think that you can scare anybody."

"I will have the heart's blood of every one of you!" the infuriated prisoner declared.

"Oh, shut up! you are enough to make a dog sick!" Kelly declared. "I can just tell you what it is, Skinny: if you don't let whisky alone you will be drummed out of the army the first thing you know!"

"And what do you s'pose I care!" the soldier howled. "To biazes with the army. It will be a proud day for me when I am clear of these cursed barracks; but I want you to understand that I am a bad man, and the galoot who stacks up ag'in' me is going to have a hard row to hoe!"

"You are the biggest fool in the fort, and if I had my way I would run you out in short order!" the sergeant declared, in disgust, as he withdrew.

"Jest wait until I git shut of this hyer den, and see if I don't lay that galoot of a sergeant out as flat as a pan-cake!" the soldier cried, shaking his clinched fist fiercely at the door which had closed behind the guard.

Then the man turned to Teton Tom.

"They have got you into the calaboose, too, hey?"

"Yes; I reckon they have got me foul."

"Well, now, I tell you, you kin jest bet yer boots that this is the last time that they ever git a chance to lock me up in this hyer hole."

"It is not agreeable," Teton Tom observed.

"Durn tha'r measly hides!" cried the soldier, in a rage. "I have got all of this sort of life that I want. I am a high-flyer, I am, and I ain't going to lead this dog's life no longer! I tell you what it is—when I git to going I am jest as bad as they make 'em. You jest ask anybody in the town if Skinny Gifford isn't a holy terror when he gits a-going!"

"I have no doubt that you are able to keep your end up," Teton Tom remarked.

"Oh, yes; I am a bad man!" the other exclaimed. "But I ain't much when it comes to a fist fight; the knife is my weapon, and when I am on the war-path with a good keen bit of steel in my hand I am a holy terror, I am."

"A knife is an ugly weapon in the hands of a man who knows how to use it."

"I am jest that critter!" the soldier declared.

"And I have jest been wasting my time in this durned kind of a life. Why, tha'r plenty of money to be picked up in this hyer country by men who have got the sand to try for it. Say! don't you want to go in with me in a leetle road-agent business? You kin bet all the ducats that you kin raise that two men like us going in cahoots could make a pile of money in a mighty few weeks."

"I reckon we would have to get out of this first," Teton Tom observed.

The soldier put on a knowing look and then winked, mysteriously.

"Don't you worry 'bout that," he replied, dropping his voice to a low and cautious tone. "This ain't the first time that I have been locked up in this durned hole, and you kin jest bet all your rocks that I ain't wasted the time that I had to put in hyer. The major is kinder down on me, and I have been s'feard that he would take some chance to sock it to me in a way I wouldn't like, so I have jest been fixing things—fixing 'em, you know, so I could light out between two days if I had to."

"That was a good idea."

"Yes, you bet it was! Oh, I am a downy bird, I tell you!" the soldier declared. "The major has got a grudge ag'in' me, and one of these days he will be sart'in to go for me. Now, I am no man's fool, and tha'r's no galoot in the garrison that kin pull the wool over my eyes. Tha'r's somebody in this hyer fort that wants to git me into trouble. My being in the guard-house now is all a put-up job."

"Is that so?" Teton Tom asked; not that he took any interest in the matter, but he spoke because he saw that the other expected him to do so.

"Yes; you know Dick Biglan—he is one of the galoots who testified against you?"

Teton Tom nodded.

"Well, the cuss and I ain't on good terms."



'cos we have had two or three growls lately, but he came to me in a real, friendly way to-day and let on that he had smuggled a bottle of whisky into the fort and said I was welcome to a share of it, and the moment he commenced to talk about whisky my throat got as dry as an ash-heap, so I jumped at the chance, and by the time we had finished the bottle both on us were full; then we got to chaffing one another, and Biglan let out that he would have seen me in blazes 'fore he would have shared any whisky with me if somebody hadn't put him up to do it jest on purpose to git me into trouble."

"That was strange."

"I didn't wait to hear any more but jest waded into him, and as we were pounding each other the guard captured us, and, darn my skin! if the major didn't believe Biglan's yarn 'bout how I was trying to kill him, so ordered me into the guard-house and let him go."

"Well, that was rough!"

"Oh, I tell you the major has got it in for me, and the first chance I get I am going to light out!"

And then the soldier indulged in pleasing anticipations of how he would get even with his enemies when he regained his liberty, and finally becoming sleepy from the effects of the liquor, stretched himself upon the bunk and was soon bound in slumber's chain.

Teton Tom fell to meditating upon the soldier's story.

"If the fellow has told the truth it is an odd affair," he mused. "Why any one should plot to get him into the guard-house is a mystery, for, from the man's appearance and words, I judge that he is one of the kind who would be certain to get into trouble without outside interference."

The soldier slept soundly until roused by the entrance of the trooper with the supper rations.

This happened to be the man, Thompson, who had sworn so strongly against Teton Tom.

The soldier greeted him as an old pard, and the two held a long consultation in whispers in the corner.

After he withdrew, the prisoners began upon their supper. It was a frugal meal and one that it did not take them long to dispatch.

By this time the darkness had come, and as the gloom gathered in the apartment the soldier remarked, abruptly:

"Pard, I reckon I am going to get out of this afore morning."

"How are you going to work it?"

"Oh, it will be as easy as rolling off a log!" the soldier exclaimed, confidently.

"Well, it may be so, but I must confess it doesn't look that way to me."

"But, you see, you don't understand how the land lays," the soldier replied. "Did you notice that Thompson and I had a long talk?"

"Yes."

"He is an old pard of mine, and is willing to do a heap for me. He knew I was in a peck of trouble and expected I would make a bolt for it. These hyer window-bars w'ot look so strong don't amount to nothing. They are all rusty, so that a good tug will fetch 'em right out. Now, about midnight I reckon to take hold of them bars and yank 'em out."

"Yes, but there is a sentinel outside!" Teton Tom exclaimed. "Have you forgotten him?"

"Oh, no, he is all right and don't you forget it!" the other replied, with a grin. "I have got that fixed. Thompson is on duty thar to-night, and I have arranged with him that when he hears me whistle he is to 'round the corner of the shanty and stay there until we have a chance to get off. I have fixed it so you kin go, too. Oh, I tell you, we will have a high old time and make big money when we git at the road-agent business," and then the soldier told story after story of the crimes which he had committed before he joined the army, and if the half only was true the wretch ought to have been hung long ago.

Teton Tom was suspicious that all was not right, and said as much, but the soldier persisted that it was and declared he would be a fool not to escape when the chance was open to him.

Slowly the hours passed away.

At midnight the sentinel was changed, and after giving time for the guard to gain the shelter of their quarters, the soldier whispered to Teton Tom that the hour had come.

Then, going to the window, he uttered a low whistle.

## CHAPTER XX.

### THE FATAL SHOT.

THE sentinel was at the end of his beat at the further extremity of the house when the low whistle of Skinny Ben fell upon his ears.

He was just turning to retrace his steps, but came to a halt after facing around.

"Aha! I reckon one of those dog-goned prisoners is up to some mischief!" the sentry exclaimed, removing his musket from his shoulder and bringing the hammer up to full cock, so as to be ready for action.

The sentinel was Dick Biglan, the man who had sworn so strongly against the adventurer.

"I will jest lay low and see if I can't have some fun with these durned galoots if they are up to any mischief," he continued. "Mebbe now because the cusses can't see me they are reckoning that I ain't here—think I have gone off to git a drink somewhar, but that ain't the kind of a rooster I am; thar ain't any better man in this hyer world for to stick to his dooty than old Dick Biglan!"

The man was well under the influence of liquor now, but as he was a regular toper, it made no perceptible difference in his gait or bearing.

Then distinctly to his ears came the sound of one of the prisoners tugging at the bars which guarded the window.

"You kin jest bet yer boots that I was right!" he exclaimed. "The birds reckon that I am out of the way—because they can't see me, and they are going for to try and get out of their cage. The major has a long head, for he had a notion that one of the fellows might be up to some mischief, and that is the reason he said to me after I was put on guard: 'Biglan, keep your eyes open to-night, and if that Teton Tom attempts to escape, don't hesitate to put a ball through him. If both git out, plug Tom. It is about time that some of our rascals here got a lesson, and if you succeed in laying out an escaping prisoner, it will be a ten-dollar slug in your pocket.'"

Then the soldier nodded his head sagely.

"Now if these galoots is trying for to git out, and I git a chance to draw a bead onto 'em, I'm jest as sure to corral that ten-dollar slug as if I had it in my pocket!"

"I hope it will be that Teton Tom, though," the sentinel continued, after a pause. "I had a heap sight rather plug him than to shoot one of the command."

The sentinel had slunk well around the corner of the house, and as he was in the shade—the moonbeams shone on the upper end of the guard-house—he was well concealed from the view of any one looking out of the window, and yet there was light enough to enable him to easily distinguish any one climbing through the casement.

The sentinel's vigilance was soon rewarded—out through the window came a head, and the sentry could easily distinguish that the head wore the broad-brimmed slouch hat of the Westerner, and not the little peaked cap of the soldier.

"It is that Teton Tom!" the sentinel muttered. "And I reckon I'll plug him now for keeps."

The head remained motionless for a moment, as though the owner was looking around to see if the coast was clear.

And then, apparently satisfied that there was no one near, the owner of the head began to climb through the window.

"The cuss has managed to wrench the window-bars away," the sentinel muttered. "But I have a bit of lead in my musket which is worth about a dozen iron bars when it comes to keeping a man from getting away."

Then he brought his gun up to his shoulder and took deliberate aim at the escaping prisoner.

A moment he dwelt on his aim, and then the sharp report of his weapon rung out clear on the still air of the night.

The man at whom the gun was aimed gave a groan of pain and tumbled through the window to the ground without.

The soldier dropped his gun, drew his revolver and sprang forward so as to be ready to intercept the other prisoner if he should attempt to come through the window, but he was apparently deterred by the fate of his companion, for no second form appeared.

The sound of the shot aroused the fort immediately.

Out from their quarters came the officer of the night and his squad. They were in the next building to the guard-house, and as they were clothed it did not take them long to reach the open air.

"What is the matter?" cried Captain Morgan, for as it happened that gentleman was on duty on this particular night.

"One of the prisoners tried to escape, captain, and I shot him!" cried the soldier, saluting.

"It is Teton Tom!" exclaimed the captain, catching sight of the broad-brimmed hat. "And you have killed the fellow!"

"That's orders, captain," cried the soldier, with another salute.

By this time the fort was in a commotion, heads were poked through windows and doors, and soldiers, more or less dressed, came hurrying to the spot.

Major Cadwalader soon made his appearance. The commander of the post was a late bird, and seldom went to bed until after one.

"What means that shot?" he questioned, as he came up to the group.

"The prisoner, Teton Tom, in attempting to escape has been shot by the sentinel," Captain Morgan replied.

"Not by a jugful!" exclaimed the voice of the adventurer, as he poked his head through the window of the guard-house. "Teton Tom

has not tried to escape, and he is still in the land of the living, thank you!"

There was a tableau of astonishment, for there was not one of the gang but had been sure that it was the adventurer who had fallen.

Major Cadwalader hurried to the window, the rest following in his footsteps.

And when the major came close to the fallen man he saw that it was indeed the soldier, Skinny Ben Gifford, who was on the ground, but he wore the broad-brimmed hat of Teton Tom.

"What does this mean?" cried the major, angrily. "How comes it that the fellow has your hat on his head?"

"Well, we changed hats," Teton Tom explained. "He was just crazy to escape and thought he had a sure thing. It was all arranged with the sentinel, he said. When he whistled the sentry was to go around to the back of the guard-house so as to give him a chance to escape."

"That's a lie!" Biglan cried. "I never made any such agreement with him!"

"That was just exactly what I thought!" the adventurer remarked. "And then, too, as I told the man, if he had made any such arrangement it did not follow that it would apply to me, and the chances were big that if I attempted to escape through the window the sentinel would be sure to shoot me."

"You bet I would!" Biglan cried.

"But my companion was a hot-headed, obstinate fellow, and being well soaked in liquor was determined that he was right and I was wrong, and in order to prove to me that this was so he said he would put on my hat, in order that the sentinel would think that he was me, and thus convince me that everything was all right, for he declared he had arranged for both of us to escape."

"It is a lie!" Biglan cried, indignantly. "He never said nothing to me and I wouldn't let him git off, nohow!"

"The shooting of the man proves that your statement is correct," Teton Tom remarked. "And it also shows that my companion did not understand the situation as well as I did, and how he should come to make such a mistake is really amazing."

"It is a lucky thing for you!" Major Cadwalader exclaimed, evidently annoyed.

"Yes, I think myself that it was lucky. I was evidently born under a fortunate star, and there is an old saying you know which declares that it is better to be born lucky than rich," Teton Tom remarked, complacently.

By this time the surgeon of the post was on the scene.

"Take a look at the man, doctor," commanded the major.

The surgeon did so.

"He is dead, major," he reported.

"You had a narrow shave!" Major Cadwalader observed, again addressing the adventurer.

"Oh, well, a miss is as good as a mile, you know," was the careless answer.

"How is it that you did not attempt to escape after the shot was fired?" the major inquired. "The sentinel's gun was empty and you had a good chance to get off."

"I did not care to make the attempt; I have no desire to secure my freedom by running away. That would not do me any good, for everybody then would be certain that I was the deserter, and as I know I am not, and feel perfectly satisfied that when I come to be tried I can prove it to the satisfaction of any fair-minded court, I would be a fool indeed to take refuge in flight. I explained my position to the soldier, but he was obstinate and would not listen to reason, and so came to his death. I am an innocent man, and will not attempt to escape even if I am not guarded."

"I think we will keep a watch on you all the same, though," the major remarked, dryly.

The window was nailed up, the body removed and again the post settled down to its normal quiet.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### AN AMBUSCADE.

THE news of this affair created a great excitement in the mining-camp when it became generally known.

The reports were much exaggerated, as is usually the case; there were three or four versions of the affair, but the one that found the widest circle of believers was that after the sentinel killed the soldier he ran off to alarm the post, and that Teton Tom could have made his escape without any trouble, but did not do so, and when questioned in regard to it, declared that he was an innocent man, and that innocent men did not run away like thieves in the night.

This story made a deep impression, although some of the prominent men in the town did not hesitate to declare the yarn to be a ridiculous one, asserting that any man placed in such a position as that held by Teton Tom would be sure to endeavor to escape if the way was open.

Archibald Crawford, the landlord of the Golden Star Hotel, and the Irish lawyer, Finnegan, were all of this opinion, but they found few to agree with them.



Finding that the current of popular opinion had turned and was running strongly in favor of the adventurer, young Burke took advantage of it to get up a committee to wait upon Major Cadwalader in regard to Teton Tom.

The committee was a representative one, being composed of some of the best men in the town. The soldier received them politely and listened with patience to their address.

"Gentlemen, I regret that the matter is one which I cannot settle," he said in reply. "There are two men who swear in the most positive manner that the prisoner is the deserter, Robert Raymond. I myself know nothing about the matter, excepting that there was a recruit, named Robert Raymond, who was sent to the post with a lot of others about a year ago, and that he deserted on the first opportunity. I was absent at the time—did not see the man, and therefore am not able to say whether the prisoner is the man or not, but he certainly answers to the description, and in the face of the positive assertion of the two men, who were Raymond's companions—enlisting at the same time—that this Teton Tom is Robert Raymond, I should be neglectful of my duty if I released him, taking his bare word, unsupported by a single bit of proof, that he is not the deserter."

This seemed good, sound sense to the committee, and they admitted as much.

"The man is in no danger if he is not the deserter," the major asserted. "In a few days, as soon as I can make the necessary arrangements, I shall send him to Fort Logan to Colonel MacLane for trial. If he is unjustly accused he has nothing to fear."

The committee expressed themselves as being satisfied, and requested the privilege of calling upon the prisoner, which the major freely granted.

Teton Tom was glad to see them, and remarked that it was pleasant to a man in a "hole" to know that all the world had not gone back on him.

The committee explained how matters stood, and Teton Tom declared that he felt no fear in regard to the result.

"When I come to have a regular trial, I shall be able to prove easily enough that I am not the man these soldiers swear I am," he said, as he parted with the committee.

For two days the adventurer remained at the camp, and then, on the morning of the third day, he was informed that he was about to depart for Fort Logan.

"I can only spare a detail of a sergeant and four men to go with you," the major announced. "So I will be obliged to put you in handcuffs. I am sorry, but under the circumstances I must take all possible precautions against your escaping on the road."

"Oh, you need not be alarmed about that!" Teton Tom declared. "I have no idea of trying any such game. You would be perfectly safe, Major Cadwalader, in turning me loose and ordering me to report at Fort Logan. I would be there as soon as your soldiers."

"That may be perfectly true, but you surely can understand that it would not be the proper thing to do," the major replied, with dignified hauteur. "The adoption of such a course would be entirely out of the question. I have written to Colonel Logan that my daughter is positive that you are not Raymond, and as she saw the fellow when he came to the post, her evidence may do you some good. I am going to take the trouble to come to Fort Logan with her so as to be present when you are tried."

"I am very much obliged, major," Teton Tom remarked. "And if I live to get to Fort Logan there is no doubt I can prove that I am not Raymond, the deserter."

A slight shade passed over the face of the soldier, and he fixed his deep, sunken, restless eyes with a keen gaze upon the countenance of the adventurer.

Teton Tom smiled blandly under the scrutiny.

"Why do you say, 'If you live to get to Fort Logan?' the major demanded, sharply. "Surely there cannot be any doubt about that matter. You are in good health now—you certainly do not expect to die on the road?"

"Well, life is very uncertain, you know, particularly amid the hills of Montana," Teton Tom answered. "What man can be sure of his existence for a single day? There are a hundred accidents that may happen on this journey to cut my thread of life in twain."

"Oh, yes, but it is extremely improbable that any serious mischance can happen to you during this short journey," the major rejoined, evidently ill at ease.

"I don't know about that; my experience is that danger often comes when we least expect it," Teton Tom replied. "And as you send me on this journey with my wrists fettered you put it out of my power to defend myself in case I am attacked."

"Oh, that is nonsense!" the major declared, and his manner showed that he did not like the turn which the conversation had taken. "You will be guarded by five well-armed soldiers, and the sergeant in command, Mike Kelly, is as good a man as the United States Army can

boast. These men would allow themselves to be cut to pieces before any harm should come to you."

"Well, your statement may be correct—on the face of it most people would declare it was so, but I have not any faith that I shall reach Fort Logan alive if you handcuff me so that I will not be able to defend myself if attacked."

"Your ideas are absurd!" Major Cadwalader exclaimed, angrily. "There is no more danger to be anticipated on the road from here to Fort Logan than there is in going from this fort to Bearfoot Bar, and if I neglected to handcuff you I should feel as if I had neglected my duty."

And then the officer cut short the conversation by departing.

In about fifteen minutes Sergeant Mike Kelly entered the room, carrying a pair of handcuffs and bade the prisoner prepare.

"I don't admire this at all," Teton Tom remarked, as the sergeant asked him to extend his hands so he could snap on the "bracelets."

"No, it isn't pleasant, but it is orders, you know, and orders must be obeyed," the soldier replied.

"Oh, yes, what can't be cured must be endured, and as I am powerless to help myself in this matter I shall have to grin and bear it," the adventurer observed.

After the handcuffs were in place the sergeant led the way to the open air.

The four soldiers were in the saddle before the guard-house, and two of the four were the men who had sworn so strongly against the prisoner, Biglan and Thompson.

The sergeant and Teton Tom mounted, and away the squad went heading up the creek toward the Missouri.

The party rode on at a brisk trot, the sergeant in the advance, then the prisoner, and the four soldiers brought up the rear, riding in twos.

A couple of hours brought the party to the junction of Prickly Pear Creek and the Missouri River.

They forded the Missouri and struck off to the eastward, and were soon among the foothills of the mountain range on the other side of which Fort Logan was situated.

By noon the party were well into the mountains, and halted for a bite of something to eat in a little valley, thickly dotted with small clumps of timber, through which ran a good-sized stream.

Silver Valley this glade was termed, from the fact that a prospecting party had once believed they had struck a rich "lead" there, but it proved to be worthless.

The valley was just about half-way between Fort Fremont and Fort Logan, and the major had instructed the sergeant to make a noon halt there.

The soldiers dismounted, tethered their horses, hung their carbines to the saddles, and prepared to take matters easy for an hour.

Having no thought of danger, the soldiers straggled off to the lower end of the valley in search of wild berries, leaving the sergeant and the prisoner together.

The two engaged in conversation for ten or twelve minutes, and by this time the troopers were out of sight.

"Those fellows had better not wander off too far, or they may get lost, for this is a hard country for a man to find his way in if he is not well acquainted with it. I'll call them back!" Kelly remarked.

The sergeant rose and walked down the valley for about a hundred yards, calling to the men as he went along.

Then suddenly, from out of a neighboring thicket, burst a band of six horsemen.

Teton Tom sprang to his feet and ran toward the sergeant, and the soldier took to his heels to join his men, who had just made their appearance a thousand yards away.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE OUTLAW'S OFFER.

THE horsemen soon overtook Teton Tom.

"Halt thar, right quick or we'll fill you full of holes!" the foremost horseman cried, as he came up to the adventurer; this was evidently the leader of the strangers, and he gave emphasis to the threat by leveling a revolver at Teton Tom.

"Hyer's a hoss for ye," the man continued. "Mount and we'll light out!"

There was no refusing an invitation couched in such a peremptory manner, and so Teton Tom jumped into the saddle, mounting without difficulty despite his fetters.

"Kin ye manage to ride with them 'ar bracelets?" the leader asked, as Teton Tom grasped the reins.

"Oh, yes!"

"All right; we'll skin out, then, and you want to keep right along with us, you know. Don't try to git away, 'cos we won't have it, and you will only git yerself into a heap of trouble if you try anything of the kind!" and the speaker flourished his revolver in the air as he spoke.

While this dialogue had been going on, one of the horsemen, with some slashes of his bowie-

knife, had cut the lariats which confined the soldiers' steeds, and then, with a wild yell, stampeded them, driving them up the valley.

The horses broke away to the right and left and soon disappeared in the bushes.

Then the horsemen retreated as speedily as they had advanced.

The soldiers were dumfounded. By this movement the marauders had made pursuit impossible.

The horsemen soon vanished amid the shrubbery, and the soldiers, realizing that it would not be possible to overtake them, did not attempt to pursue, but scattered in search of their horses.

Straight through the wild and broken country the horsemen rode, and now Teton Tom had a good opportunity to see what they were like.

The men were evidently outlaws, for each and every one were armed to the teeth and wore a black mask so as to conceal the face.

Most men would have been apt to jump to the conclusion that it was through a friendly motive the masked men had been led to interfere, but Teton Tom did not think so.

It was his opinion that he had fallen out of the frying-pan into the fire.

The horsemen rode straight onward for a good hour, then they turned to the right and plunged into the very heart of the mountain-range.

At last they halted in a little valley shut in by grim mountain-peaks—as wild and desolate a spot as could be found in all Montana.

This was evidently the head-quarters of the band, for there were a couple of rude huts and a small corral for the accommodation of the horses.

The horsemen dismounted, and, in obedience to the orders of the brawny fellow who had spoken to Teton Tom, the chief, evidently, the prisoner was conveyed to the largest one of the two huts.

Then the outlaw leader directed that a sentinel should be posted at the lower end of the valley so as to guard against a surprise, although he remarked, with grim emphasis:

"I reckon the odds are 'bout a million to one that none of them fool soldiers will be able to smell out the trail, 'cos it would bother an old mountain-man, and we would make it hot for them if they did."

Teton Tom had too much experience in this line not to understand how true the surmise was.

The chief followed the prisoner into the hut. The only furniture within it was a rude bunk, made out of pine branches covered with a couple of wolf-skins, and a section of a log, set up on end, for a stool.

Teton Tom sat down on the bunk and the outlaw took possession of the stool.

"Wal, you are making yourself comfortable, I see!" the stranger exclaimed.

"Oh, yes, I believe in taking things easy," the other replied, and he leaned back on the bunk as he spoke.

"I reckon you ar' right, but thar ar' mighty few men who are able to do it."

By this time Teton Tom had come to the conclusion that the speaker was no stranger to him; the voice was certainly familiar, as was also the appearance of the man, although from the fact of his face being hidden it was not easy to identify him.

"It seems to me that I have seen you somewhere before," Teton Tom remarked. "Anyway, your voice is familiar."

The brawny fellow chuckled.

"Wal, now, I reckon you ar' a pretty keen one, and no mistake," he observed. "But you ar' right; this ain't the first time that we have chinned together."

"That was my idea, but not being able to see your face makes it a difficult matter for me to place you."

The outlaw removed his mask and revealed the features of the genial stranger with whom Teton Tom had conversed in the saloon of the hotel.

"Thar, I reckon you kin savvy me now!" he observed, with a grin.

"Ah, yes, I know you, and I thought I did, too, although I wasn't sure as to where I had met you. If I remember rightly your name is Hickman."

"Yes, sir-ee, that is my handle. Bill Hickman, generally called Tough Bill Hickman, and I reckon thar ain't no discount on me!"

"But what is the meaning of this disguise?" Teton Tom questioned.

"Oh, this is my reg'lar biz," the other explained. "I ain't no miner! I am not the man to fool away my time for three or four dollars a day when I kin take it easy like a gentleman and pull out a thousand or two at a single lick. When you met me in the camp I was jest prospecting around, looking for a chance to make a haul, you know."

"Ah, yes, I see."

"And when I ran across you I jest had a notion that you were the kind of man I wanted to jine my band, and so, when you got inter the mess with the sodjers, I made up my mind to git you out of it if the trick could be worked."



"Well, you did it up brown!"

"Oh, you bet! and that is the kind of man I am!" the outlaw declared. "I wanted jest sich a pard as you ar' and I reckoned to git you out of your fix."

"I am much obliged!"

"Oh, don't mention it!" the outlaw exclaimed. "I am jest the kind of man that sticks to my pards, and I reckoned from the talk I had with you that it was likely we could do a good stroke of business together."

A look of surprise appeared on the face of Teton Tom.

"I don't think I understand you," he said.

"I got the idee from the way you war pumping me 'bout the Black Snake Mine," Hickman explained.

"Oh, I was only inquiring out of pure curiosity."

"Come now! don't try to fool your uncle!" the outlaw exclaimed. "I know better than that! You ain't the kind of a man to waste words. You don't chin without thar's a pint to be made. Besides, you don't fool me, you know, with any Teton Tom business, for I know you."

"Now you really excite my curiosity!" the prisoner declared. "For if I am anybody but Teton Tom I should like to know it."

"Oh, I know who you are well enough!" the other exclaimed. "I reckon you can see from the looks of my figure-head that I ain't no chicken, but a reg'lar old-timer."

Teton Tom nodded. This was the truth. Tough Bill Hickman was a man of fifty, or thereabouts.

"I was up along Prickly Pear Crick 'fore thar was any sich town as Bearfoot Bar, and I know all about the Black Snake Mine business, and I kin call you by name, easy ernuff!"

"Well, if you call me anything but Teton Tom you will not hit the truth!" the adventurer declared.

"That is all well enuff to give the crowd, but you can't stuff me!" Hickman declared. "Your name is George Randal Crawford, and you are a son of the Colonel Crawford who discovered the Black Snake Mine, and who was killed in a fight over the claim! I knew your father like a book, and I kin see his face looking right out at me from yours, and your leetle game up in this region is to hunt down and kill the men who killed your father."

Teton Tom laughed.

"Oh, my friend, you are away off! Can't you see that I am a half-breed?"

"That is all right! you are disguised, of course!" the outlaw declared. "You wouldn't be sich a fool as to come walking 'round hyer without fixing yourself up so that no one would know you. Now, I am jest the man you want to strike. I have a good band at my back, and can help you to git at the men you want to strike if you make it worth my while."

"You are on the wrong track. I have no enemies—no scheme of vengeance to carry out, and do not need your aid."

"Oh, bosh, I know better!" cried Hickman, angrily. "And I kin jest tell you what it is: if you ain't willing to let me go in with you, I will j'ine the other side. I have got you in a pretty bad box hyer, and if I choose to make dog's meat out of you, I kin do it and no one will be the wiser, so you had better take up with my offer. I will give you time to think it over," and the outlaw rose.

"When I come back I want a decided answer, and if you don't agree your jig is up!"

Then Hickman departed.

#### CHAPTER XXIII.

##### AN UNEXPECTED DISCOVERY.

AFTER the departure of the outlaw Teton Tom began to meditate upon the situation.

"It is as I suspected," he muttered; "out of the frying-pan into the fire. This fellow is not honest in the offer that he has made. It is but a clever device to get me to confide in him. The conspirators have become alarmed, and they are anxious to find out whether they are in danger or not. They hesitate to put me to death on bare suspicion, and then, too, they are desirous, probably, of ascertaining just how great is the danger. One of the oddest things about the affair is the fact that these rascals have pitched upon me as being the son of Colonel Randal Crawford, and seem to have no suspicion that my pard is really the man. Another strange fact, too, is that the old fellow, Dumb Dickey, should take me to be the colonel himself come back to life. That is the delusion of a distracted brain, of course, but I must bear a strong resemblance to Crawford or else the idea would not have occurred to him."

"Now, then, what is my game?"

And the adventurer meditated over the matter for a few minutes.

"I am in a tight place here and no mistake," he murmured, at last. "No way of escape open, as far as I can see; still, there is many a slip between the cup and the lip, and a man ought not to despair until the last moment comes."

"This Hickman is an unscrupulous cut-throat, and there is no doubt he would not hesi-

tate to take my life if he got his price for so doing. By giving the information that he seeks I should not save my life, but only render certain my death, therefore I must persist in my denial."

"These fellows are playing the game with wonderful skill!" Teton Tom exclaimed, abruptly, as the thought came to him. "The idea of their employing this Hickman to get me into conversation so that they might learn if I was anxious to discover the particulars regarding the Black Snake Mine, and the rascal played his part so well that I had no suspicion he was a spy."

The meditations of the adventurer were interrupted at this point by the entrance of one of the outlaw band, a thick-set, muscular fellow, with a very dark complexion, and after Teton Tom took a good look at him he came to the conclusion that he was an Indian.

The outlaw had removed his mask so the adventurer was able to see what he looked like.

The fellow had evidently been detailed as a guard to watch the prisoner, for after entering he squatted upon the floor, produced a pipe, filled it with tobacco and began to smoke, surveying the captive the while with a stolid gaze.

Teton Tom studied the face of the Indian for a few minutes, and then the conviction came to him that he had met the man before, but he was not able to recall where or when.

"It seems to me that your face is not strange to me," he remarked.

The Indian shook his head as much as to imply that he did not recollect ever meeting the other.

"Yes, the longer I look at you the stronger grows the impression that we have met before." Again the Indian shook his head.

"You are an Indian."

The other nodded assent.

"What tribe?"

"Crow, maybe," replied the red-skin with a slight scowl upon his dusky face, as though the subject was not a pleasant one.

"I thought so!" Teton Tom exclaimed. "I felt pretty certain that I had met you before, although it is so many years ago that it was not possible for me to remember right away the circumstance, but when you say you are a Crow that helps me to remember."

Then the Indian fell to studying the face of Teton Tom, but after a few minutes he shook his head.

"You don't remember me?" the adventurer asked.

The chief shook his head.

"Well, that is not strange, for I have changed a great deal in the last twenty years, and it is fully twenty years since we have met."

The Indian seemed surprised at this statement, and again he studied the face of the other intently, but, as before, he finished the scrutiny by shaking his head.

"Possibly I should not have remembered you but for the strong likeness you bear to your father, the great Crow chief, White Eagle."

A dark look came over the face of the Indian, and he remarked, slowly:

"White Eagle was a great Crow chief."

"And you, his son, One Tree, bid fair to follow in his footsteps, but for the love of a fair Crow squaw you killed a young brave who was a successful rival. The squaw who witnessed the fight swore that you took an unfair advantage and killed the chief without giving him a chance to defend himself."

"It was a lie!" the Indian declared. "The fight was a fair one, and I killed the chief because I was a better warrior."

"But the girls swore to the contrary, and as the relatives of the dead man had a deal of influence in the tribe they made it so hot that you were obliged to fly for your life. You became a wanderer and an outcast—you who might have become one of the great chiefs of the Crow nation."

Teton Tom had uttered these words in the Crow language, much to the amazement of the Indian, for the adventurer spoke the Indian tongue as fluently as though he had never known any other.

"What are you—a great medicine-man that you are able to read the past?" the red-skin cried, in his native language.

"Oh, no, I am no medicine-man, and twenty years ago I was your companion, and together we learned prairie-craft from the lips of the old chiefs. I am White Crow!"

For a moment the Indian stared in astonishment and then he nodded his head, slowly:

"Yes, yes, you are right; I remember you now, although you have changed greatly."

"And you, too, have changed, One Tree; how is it that I find you here in company with these white outlaws?"

"It is the cursed fire-water of the white-skins," the other replied, doggedly. "It gets into my head and makes me mad; and then what else is there for me? Am I not an outcast—a warrior without a tribe—is not my life blasted?"

"No, there is a chance for you to redeem yourself. The squaw who swore falsely against you, in order to revenge the death of her lover, has been summoned to the happy hunting grounds, and on her death-bed she confessed that she had

lied. Of the chiefs who were instrumental in having you driven from the tribe, only two remain, and they have not the influence now that they used to possess. You can go back and defy your enemies; you will find friends to back you."

Eagerly the warrior listened to the cheering words.

"It is good!" he cried, in the sententious Indian way. "You have given me new life. But you, my brother, you are in trouble."

"Oh, yes; I think this white scoundrel means to kill me."

"Yes, my orders were to shoot you if you attempted to escape."

"He thinks I possess a certain secret, and if I do not reveal it to him he will undoubtedly murder me."

"He shall not! I will kill him with my own hand first!" the chief declared.

"No, you must not do that, for then you would have to fight the rest of the gang, and, fettered as I am, I would not be able to be of any assistance to you. We must trick this white scoundrel. Bad as these ruffians are, the chances are great that none of them will care for the job of killing me in cold blood, and you must volunteer to be my executioner."

"It is good, I will do it."

"I have been looking at these handcuffs, and I think by introducing the point of a knife they can be sprung open."

"I will try," responded the Indian.

It was as Teton Tom had said. The handcuffs were old-fashioned ones, and it was an easy matter to pick the lock.

Then by stuffing a small piece of wood in the catch, so as to keep the bolt from shooting home, it was possible for Teton Tom to still present the appearance of being securely manacled when in reality by a single motion he could shake the handcuffs off.

"Now, then, in case our game of deception does not work, we will stand some chance in a hand-to-hand fight!" Teton Tom observed.

"Better try that plan right away when you get a chance at the white chief," the red-skin suggested. "He is fully armed, and if we take him by surprise, and secure his weapons, there will be only four men to fight, and one of them is on guard down the valley, so he cannot get here until we have a chance to settle some of the others."

"That is a good idea," the adventurer remarked. "You are right; that is the game. He will not suspect that there is any danger of my attacking him, and I will be sure to take him by surprise."

"If you kill him it does not matter," the Indian remarked. "He is a bad man."

"He looks like one."

"It is his boast that he has killed more men than he has fingers and toes."

"If that is so it is about time he got a lesson."

The Indian held up his hand in warning.

"Hush! some one comes!" he said, in a cautious whisper.

#### CHAPTER XXIV.

##### THE TOUGH MAN IS ASTONISHED.

THE keen ears of the red-skin had not deceived him. There were heavy footsteps approaching, and in a few moments the outlaw chief entered the hut.

"Well, how do you find yourself now?" he asked. "Have you made up your mind to make a clean breast of it?"

"I see you are determined not to believe my statement that I have nothing to reveal."

"Oh, that is all gammon! I know better than that!" the big fellow cried, roughly. "I want you to understand, Mr. Teton Tom, that I am a man who is up to snuff, and the galoot who pulls the wool over my eyes will have to get up mighty early in the morning to do the job."

"I am not trying to deceive you," Teton Tom protested.

"Yes, you are, and you know durned well that you ar' trying for to play the biggest kind of a gum game on me; but I reckon you will find out afore you ar' through that you can't work it nohow you kin fix it."

"Oh, no; it is you who are playing the game, not I."

"Wal, I reckon I have got you foul!" and the outlaw indulged in a hoarse laugh. "And you can jest bet your boots that I wouldn't have gone into it if I had not made up my mind that thar was a heap of money into the thing."

"I don't understand how you came to get an idea of that kind!" Teton Tom exclaimed, affecting to be astonished.

"It is all along of this Black Snake Mine business," Hickman declared. "I know thar's big money into that mine, and I reckon you are trying to work the game so as to git hold of it—going for to try to make out, I s'pect, that these hyer men who have got hold on it now ain't got no right to the property and that it r'ally belongs to you through your dad."

"Oh, you are away off!" the adventurer exclaimed. "Why, if you will take the trouble to reflect about the matter you ought to be able to see that, even if I were the man you take me to be, I would not stand any chance to secure



the Black Snake property, held as it is by some of the leading men in the camp—men, too, who are utterly unscrupulous, and would not hesitate to resort to any mode of fighting in order to defend their property."

The outlaw looked a little surprised at this bold declaration.

"Oh, you make a good bluff—thar's no mistake 'bout that," he remarked, after thinking the matter over for a moment. "But I am up to you all the same. I know that I am right 'bout the thing, and all the talk you kin make won't alter my opinion. And since you ar' so durned stubborn 'bout the thing I reckon I will have to see if I can't show you that I am jest as obstinate as you ar'," and the big fellow shook his head in a threatening way.

"Oh, no, you are altogether wrong. I am only telling you the truth."

"Bosh! I know better!" the other cried. "And since you ain't willing to make a clean breast of it, I reckon I will have to put the screws on you, and, mebbe, in a way you won't like, but that is the kind of man I am, you know. I am as easy and gentle as kin be until you go to rub my fur the wrong way, and then I'm a terror, you bet!"

"I see that it is only a waste of words to talk to you; you have made up your mind, and you are determined to stick to it, right or wrong," Teton Tom remarked.

"You kin bet all you are worth that you never met a fellow who was keener to stick to anything than a galoot about my size!" the outlaw exclaimed. "Now, mebbe you think I am going to be satisfied with your story that you ain't up to any game?"

"Well, you ought to be!" the adventurer retorted.

"But I ain't, and I reckon I will be able to make you sing a different song afore I am through with you. I have taken the steel out of obstinate men afore, and I reckon I know how to do it as well as any man you ever saw. You think you ar' plucky, mebbe—got lots of sand in your craw, but I bet I kin find a way to make you squeal."

"Oh, you are a big blowhard!" cried Teton Tom, contemptuously; his purpose being to irritate the outlaw.

The words produced the desired effect, for Hickman became red with rage.

"What is that you say, durn ye?" he cried, advancing toward Teton Tom and threatening him with his clinched fist. "You ar' going to be sassy, are ye? Wal, now, you can jest bet all the rocks you kin raise that I will take that out of you! I ain't a-going to kill you right off; that ain't my game, 'cos' dead men can't talk nohow, and I reckon to make you spit out what I want to know afore I git through with you. I am going to try some good old mountain games on you—going to torture you a leetle so as to see jest how much sand you have got. Did you ever smell a red-hot iron held within an inch of your nose?" and he glared with the look of a fiend into the face of the captive.

"No, I cannot say that I have. That is a little experience which I have yet to undergo."

"You will come to it mighty soon!" the outlaw declared. "I have known many an obstinate man find the use of his tongue when he felt the heat of the iron burning his eyes, and then thar's the little dodge that the old pirates down on the Spanish Main used to work: build a nice hot fire and put a man so that his feet will git well toasted by it. Oh, I reckon I will make you talk afore I git through with you!"

"You are a cowardly scoundrel, and one of these days the hangman's rope will choke the life out of you!" Teton Tom exclaimed.

This speech increased the anger of the outlaw.

It had been his idea to frighten the prisoner with his threats, and he was astonished at being thus braved.

"You miserable galoot!" he fairly howled, and he shook his fist in the face of Teton Tom, who had risen to his feet as the other approached. "I will make you change your tune before you are an hour older! I will bring you down on your marrow-bones and make you yell for mercy!"

Teton Tom had his hands together in front of him, and managed to withdraw the right one from the handcuff without attracting the outlaw's attention.

And being thus prepared for a struggle he provoked it without delay.

"You red-handed butcher!" the adventurer cried. "I laugh at your threats and defy your power!"

"Inside of ten minutes I'll fix you!" the other retorted. "And I will jest smash you once now so as to larn you to keep a civil tongue in your head!"

But as he drew back his arm so as to give due force to the blow, Teton Tom anticipated the action and with wonderful quickness struck the outlaw full in the face with his right fist, but being so situated that he could not put all the power of his muscular arm into the blow, the stroke only staggered the ruffian back a yard or so and did not prostrate him.

But before Hickman could recover himself Teton Tom was upon him, and this time the blow

catching the outlaw right between the eyes sent him over on his back.

Sudden as the attack had been though, it was not quick enough to keep the outlaw from sounding an alarm.

The fact that the prisoner had succeeded in freeing himself from the handcuffs was enough to alarm Hickman even if no attack had been made upon him.

The Indian had sprung to his feet and drawn his revolver.

The yells of the outlaw captain had attracted the attention of the gang, and the sound of hasty footsteps approaching the hut could be distinctly heard.

After being knocked down, Hickman did not attempt to rise, but hastened to draw his pistol.

Teton Tom was on the watch, though, for just such a movement, and the moment the outlaw produced the pistol he pounced upon him.

He grasped Hickman by the throat and choked him until he was black in the face, at the same time with his left hand seizing the ruffian's right wrist so as to prevent him from using the revolver.

Hickman struggled with all his power, but although a powerful man, he was no match for his antagonist, and was not able to break the grip which was slowly, but surely, choking him into insensibility.

The noise of the footsteps grew nearer and nearer, and soon a couple of the gang rushed into the hut.

The Indian was prepared for them, though, and as the two made their appearance he opened fire on them.

The ruffians had their pistols in their hands, but, notwithstanding this fact, they were not prepared for so warm a reception, so the Indian was able to fire two shots before they could discharge their weapons, and these shots stretched the outlaws upon the ground, for the red skin was an excellent marksman and fired to kill.

There were only two more of the gang, and although they were close upon the heels of their comrades, yet when the sound of the shots, followed by the cries of the wounded men, fell upon their ears, a sudden fear came upon them, and they halted, afraid to venture into the hut.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### TURNING THE TABLES.

"I SAY, Jake, w'ot in blazes is the meaning of this hyer thing?" quoth one of the outlaws, in amazement.

"Durned if I know," responded the other, "but it 'pears as if thar was a big fight going on inside, and it kinder looks, too, as if our cusses were gitting the worst on it."

"Thar's four on 'em inside!" exclaimed the first ruffian. "Four ag'in' one, and it don't seem possible that he could git away with the hull on 'em."

"I dunno," responded the second outlaw, with a dubious shake of the head. "Mebbe this galoot is a reg'lar teaser. One thing is sartain: our pards are in thar, and they hain't come out, and I reckon I will wait awhile afore I rush in so as to kinder see how the land lies."

"I reckon your head is level every time!" the first fellow declared, with an approving nod. "This hyer is a blamed queer thing, and it kinder looks as if our pards wasn't gitting the best of the fight, 'cos if they was they would be apt to put in an appearance and say so."

"Pard, ain't we a leetle close to this shanty?" the other inquired, with an anxious look around.

"You bet!" cried the other, emphatically. "If this hyer galoot has flaxed the four, it is as sart'in as anything kin be that he will go in for to try his hand on us, and we mustn't give away any pints."

The other nodded assent to this sage remark, and the two prudently retreated until they were fully a hundred feet from the hut; then they halted, each man sheltering himself behind a tree-trunk.

These words had been rapidly exchanged, taking far less time than we have occupied in transcribing them, and by the time the pair reached their positions the struggle within the hut had ended.

Teton Tom had choked the outlaw chief into insensibility, despite all the struggles of the muscular ruffian, and when this was accomplished he disarmed the man and snapped the handcuffs upon his wrists.

"We will see how he relishes a dose of his own medicine," the adventurer remarked, grimly, as the steel bracelets closed with a sharp snap.

The Indian, after disposing of his men, had stepped to the door so as to be in readiness to receive the other two as soon as they made their appearance, and, being on the watch, all his senses on the alert, soon made the discovery that the pair had come to a halt, and this fact he at once communicated to his companion.

"They are wise," Teton Tom commented,

"for it would be like forcing an entrance into a lion's den to seek to enter here."

A few moments more, and the red-skin announced that the pair had retreated.

He had peered through the crack of the door and so ascertained what action the ruffians had taken.

"It is evident that they have become alarmed," Teton Tom remarked. "The sound of the shots warned them that there was a fight going on in here, and the fact that their comrades have not made their appearance excited their suspicion that all is not as it ought to be."

"They have retreated and sheltered themselves behind trees," the red-skin observed.

"I reckon we will have to go out and go for them," Teton Tom remarked. "If the mountain will not come to the man, then the man must go to the mountain. These fellows are like the wily fox in the fable who noticed that all the tracks went into the lion's den, but none came out. They saw their comrades enter, have not been gratified with a view of their coming out, and, naturally, have jumped to the conclusion that there is something wrong."

"We can easily defeat them," the Indian exclaimed, with true savage arrogance. "Neither one of them is a great brave."

"The quicker we go for them then the better!" the adventurer remarked.

During these few words he had been examining the revolvers which he had taken from the outlaw chief in order to ascertain whether they were in condition for battle or not.

The weapons were good ones, fully charged and prepared for service.

"Are you ready, brother?" asked the Indian.

"All ready—go ahead!"

Through the door stepped the pair, and the astonishment of the two ruffians as they beheld the prisoner, freed from his handcuffs and fully armed, accompanied by his red jailer, the two apparently on the best of terms, can better be imagined than described.

"Thunder and lightning!" cried the first outlaw in supreme astonishment. "Durn my skin if the red skunk ain't gone back on us!"

"Blow me tight if it don't look like it!" the other declared.

"And, I say, the cusses are coming on as if they meant business!"

"You kin bet your bottom dollar that they do!" the other responded. "You kin see now that they have cleaned out the captain and the other two."

"Oh, yes, no doubt!" assented the first fellow. "And it strikes me that we don't stand the biggest show in the world to git away with these galoots."

"Your head is level thar, and for my part I don't see why we should chip into this game whar we don't stand no show for our money. The captain and the other cusses were able to hoe their own row, and if they have gone under we ain't obligated to take up the fight."

"Nary time! and I will jest spit it out to these galoots too so as to let 'em know that we ar' willing to call the thing squar' and pull out."

"That is the talk! I am with you, every time!"

Thus encouraged, the first outlaw stepped from behind his tree and held up his hands, making the Indian signal of peace.

"Ah! it is as you expected!" Teton Tom exclaimed to his companion. "They have no idea of fighting."

"More squaws than warriors," responded the Indian, contemptuously.

"Oh, no, they are wise men who hesitate to go into a fight when there isn't any chance for them to make anything!" the adventurer declared. "Undoubtedly they were merely carrying out the orders of their leader in capturing me, and take no personal interest in the matter at all."

"Squaws! they would rather run with the rabbit than fight like a wildcat!" the Indian exclaimed.

"Say, stranger, I reckon you have come out on top in this hyer leetle difficulty!" the first outlaw cried.

"Yes, that is about the size of it," Teton Tom replied. "With the assistance of my red pard here I have succeeded in laying out your leader and two of his men, and I am ready to commence operations upon you two just as soon as you are ready."

"Pardner, I reckon you will have to excuse me and my friend hyer. We ain't got no grudge ag'in' you that we knows on," the ruffian declared.

"No, sir-ee, nary grudge!" the other outlaw assented, coming from behind his tree. "And we ain't fools enough to chip in to any game without thar is a chance for us to collar a big stake."

"Them is my sentiments to a hair!" the other asserted. "The captain had his reasons, I s'pose, for going for you, but we don't know nothing about it, and if he has not been able to keep his end up I don't see that we are called upon to go into the thing, so, if it is all the same to you, we will draw out."

"I have no objection," Teton Tom remarked. "If you don't care to engage in the quarrel I



am not anxious that you should. I am willing to call it square as the matter stands if you are."

"You kin jest bet that we ain't hankering for any of it in ours!" the fellow replied.

"Have you any idea why your captain went into this game?" the adventurer asked.

"Nary an idee! Tough Bill Hickman is a close-mouthed galoot, he is, and ain't the kind of man for to give his plans away. We don't know a thing 'bout the raffle. He never let on nothing to us."

From the way the fellow spoke, Teton Tom felt convinced he was telling the truth, and so did not press the matter.

"Are you two willing to get out and leave my pard and I in possession of the camp?" he asked.

"Oh, yes; all we want is our hosses, and then we will git as fast as the Lord will let us!" the fellow declared.

"Go ahead as soon as you please!"

The pair were quick to improve the opportunity, and in five minutes more were in the saddle, their horses trotting down the valley.

The pards watched them until they disappeared in the distance.

"We shall not be troubled by them again," Teton Tom remarked. "They are only too glad to be able to get away without being forced into a fight, and now I must put the screws upon this outlaw chief, for I am determined to find out who it was that put him up to attack me."

"He will not speak," the Indian observed.

"Oh, yes, he will, upon due persuasion," and a peculiar gleam appeared in the eyes of the adventurer as he spoke. "This ruffian suggested to me certain ways by means of which an obstinate man might be induced to speak, and he has no right to complain if I try some of his own medicine upon him."

Then Teton Tom reentered the hut, while the Indian remained without as a sentinel.

#### CHAPTER XXVI.

##### A MERCILESS EXAMINATION.

As Teton Tom entered the hut the outlaw chief rose slowly to a sitting position. He had just recovered his senses, and his rage at finding himself a prisoner, with the steel bracelets upon his wrists, was great.

But he was still too weak and sick from the effects of the choking which he had received to attempt to fight, even if his hands had not been fettered, but the look of hatred which he bestowed upon Teton Tom, as the adventurer confronted him, was fiendish in the extreme.

"Well, the conditions under which we now meet are a little different from what they were a while ago," Teton Tom remarked.

"I was the biggest fool in the world not to kill ybu when I had you in my power!" the outlaw declared.

"If you had pursued that course you certainly would have had the best of the affair," the adventurer remarked.

"I wanted to play sharp, and so got cotched in this hyer hobble."

"How play sharp?"

"Why, I reckoned thar was a big stake in this thing somewhar, and I was in hopes I could git a piece of it."

"By not killing me, eh?"

"Yes."

"But, I say, who was it set you on to attack me?"

"Nobody!" the outlaw responded, doggedly.

"Oh, I know better than that," Teton Tom responded. "There wasn't any reason why you should attack me unless some one put you up to it."

"Oh, yes, there was! Didn't you try for to pump me 'bout the Black Snake Mine? Ain't you the son of the man who originally diskivered the lode?"

"Oh, what nonsense!" Teton Tom exclaimed.

"Can't you see that I am a half-breed?"

"You are fixed up to look like one—any fool kin see that, but you are young Crawford, all the same!"

"Oh, no, that is ridiculous, and if you knew anything about the matter you would not be apt to make any such mistake."

"Wal, I will admit that I ain't so well posted as I ought to be," the outlaw said. "But I have had a talk with a man who is posted—a cuss who knows the hull thing as well as any man who kin be scared up in these diggings, and what he don't know 'bout the thing ain't worth knowing."

"You are speaking of Archibald Crawford, I suppose, the man who now runs the Black Snake Mine?" Teton Tom observed.

The outlaw put on a wise look and then shook his head slowly.

"I reckon it don't make no difference to you who I was talking to," he remarked. "One thing is sart'in, though, you are 'way off the track, for it wasn't Archy Crawford."

"Who was it?"

"Oho!" the outlaw exclaimed, "I reckon that is a bit of my business which I ain't going to give away!"

The brows of the adventurer contracted.

"You infernal scoundrel!" he cried, and he

shook his clinched fist in the face of the ruffian, "what sort of a man do you take me to be? Do you think I am one of the kind who can be imposed upon with impunity? You miserable hound! are you not helpless in my power? And are you for a moment fool enough to believe that I cannot find a way to make you speak?"

A look of defiance was on the face of the outlaw as he glared at the half-breed.

"Do you think I am the kind of galoot who kin be skeered?" he cried. "If you do you are 'way off! My name is Tough Bill Hickman, and you kin bet all the wealth you kin get your hands on that I live up to my handle every time!"

"Well, Mr. Tough Bill, I reckon I am the kind of man who breaks just such bills as you are," Teton Tom retorted. "There are certain things that you know that I want to know, and I have made up my mind that you shall tell me. In the first place I want to find out who it was that sent you on to get in conversation with me in Bearfoot Bar and instructed you to talk about the Black Snake Mine. That is point number one, and number two is, who put you up to this rescue business?"

"And do you think I am going to give the thing away?" the ruffian cried. "Why you don't know me!"

"And you don't know me if you think I cannot force you to do exactly as I please now that I have you helpless in my power," Teton Tom retorted, sternly. "Awhile ago you were talking about hot irons applied to men's eyes—how certain such treatment was to make an obstinate man talk, even if he had resolved not to open his mouth. You were perfectly sure you could force me to speak, and as you seem to be a judge of that sort of thing, I reckon there is something in it. Anyway, I will soon find out, for I am going to try the hot-iron business on you before you are many minutes older unless you conclude to knuckle and do as I want you to."

A moment the outlaw gazed into the stern face of the half-breed, and then his rage broke forth in a torrent of oaths.

He swore in the most horrible manner until he was fairly out of breath.

Teton Tom waited patiently until the outlaw's passion ended, and then, in the calm, determined tones of a judge delivering sentence, said:

"I reckon swearing will not do you any good. The irons will burn you just the same, no matter how much you swear."

"If you dare to do it I wouldn't give a dollar for your life!" Hickman cried.

"You are not asked to make any bid!" Teton Tom retorted. "I have been able to look out for myself pretty well up to date, and yet I have met some good men in my time too. You thought you had me foul and yet I managed to crawl out of the trap."

"It was that cursed red-skin. I will kill the red buck the first chance I git!" the ruffian declared.

"I reckon you will not be able to damage anybody much until you get out of this hobble. Come! I haven't got any time to waste. Are you going to do as I wish or shall I be obliged to try the persuasive powers of the hot iron?"

"I'll kill you if you do the first time I meet you afterward!" Hickman cried.

"Oh, bosh! after your eyes are burnt out, you will not be able to do much damage to any one," the adventurer retorted, in so heartless a way that it fairly chilled the blood in the veins of the outlaw.

Then Teton Tom stepped to the door and bade the red-skin get the iron, light a fire and heat it.

"Me do it," responded the red-skin, and then he strode away.

Teton Tom leaned against the door-post of the house and watched the Indian, paying no attention to the prisoner.

A hundred wild ideas flashed rapidly through the brain of the outlaw, and bitterly he cursed the unlucky chance which had given him into the hands of the adventurer.

If he only had the use of his hands—if his weapons had not been taken away from him—if he could meet his foe in a fair fight, man to man; and then he fairly groaned in rage as he reflected upon his helpless position.

"You don't dare to give me a fair show!" he exclaimed. "You don't dare to give me back my we'pons, take off these cursed handcuffs and fight me like a man!" he cried.

"Oh, there isn't any dare about it," Teton Tom responded. "You would not have been willing to give me any such opportunity when you had me foul, and most certainly you ought not to expect any better treatment than you were willing to give. Besides, to yield to your wish would upset my plans. I am anxious to get you to speak so as to learn who it was that set you on to attack me, and if I should give you a chance for a fair fight, the odds are about a hundred to one that I should kill you, and then I would not be able to obtain the information. I would be a fool indeed to throw away the advantage which I have gained. Oh, no, we will go on as we are. You will reveal what I want to know, or I will torture you in such a

way as to make you wish you had never been born!"

In his soul the ruffian trembled, for he realized that he need not expect any mercy, and then, despite his boasts, he "weakened," to use the terse Western word.

The sound of the red-skin breaking up sticks for the fire, which came plainly to his ears, probably had something to do with his sudden change of mind.

"If I make a clean breast of it, will you let me go free?" he asked.

"Yes; and give you all the chance for a fight that you want afterward, if you are hankering after satisfaction."

The outlaw made a grimace and then shook his head slowly.

"That is a p'int that we kin settle arterwards," he said. "In course it is only nat'ral for a man to feel r'iled when he is caughted in a tight place, but I reckon that if I am lucky enough to git out of this I won't be apt to trouble you ag'in."

"All right, just as you please; but I stand ready to give you satisfaction if you are anxious for it," Teton Tom declared.

"Wal, no; I reckon I will be glad to call the thing squar' if I git off all right this time. I ain't no hog, and I ginerally know when I git enough."

"Go ahead then and tell me how you came to go into the matter."

#### CHAPTER XXVII.

##### A BOLD ANNOUNCEMENT.

THUS directed, the outlaw began his recital.

"It won't take me long to spit it out," he declared. "Black Bill Ricolls is at the bottom of the hull thing. Black Bill and I are old pards, and we have been mixed up in some big jobs, so when he wanted a man to work a difficult trick he pitched straight on me."

"But Black Bill is not the principal, I reckon," Teton Tom remarked. "He merely acted as agent for somebody else."

"Wal, now, do you know I never troubled my head 'bout the matter," the fellow observed, slowly. "He told me that you were nosing round the Black Snake Mine in a way he did not like, and he wanted me to take the job of settling your hash."

"Now, I had never seen you and didn't know nothing at all 'bout you, but when I came to talk chin a bit with you I smelt a rat. I knew Colonel Crawford in the old time, and you are so much like him that it did not take me long to see what Black Bill Ricolls was up to. Oh, I spotted his leetle game! He was afeard you had come hyer to look arter the Black Snake Mine—mebbe to set up some claim to it, and as he is making a good thing out of the property he didn't intend to be 'listed out of it, so he wanted some good man to go for you."

"I suspected that the Black Snake men were at the bottom of it," the adventurer remarked. "And Ricolls undoubtedly was merely acting as spokesman for the rest."

"Like as not; but I don't know nothing 'bout it. I took the job without thinking much about the matter, and it wasn't until arter I had got you into my hands that the idee came to me that I could make a good thing out of it, but I slipped up jest terribly on it."

"What bargain did you make with Black Bill in regard to me?"

"I was to take you off to some lonely place, arter gitting you out of the hands of the sodgers, and fix you for planting," the outlaw responded, speaking in the most careless and matter-of-fact way, just as if there was nothing out of the common in the transaction.

"He wanted me disposed of so there would not be any danger of my troubling anybody."

"That was his say-so, for sure," the ruffian responded, with a grin.

"And this is all you know about the matter?"

"Yes, honest! You can depend upon it!" the outlaw asserted. "I am giving it to you as straight as a string. Oh, I tell yer; I'm a man of my word!"

"Then it is Black Bill Ricolls whom I must hold accountable for this attack?"

"He's the man!"

"Do you suppose Major Cadwalader knew anything about the matter?" Teton Tom asked, abruptly.

A look of amazement appeared on the face of the other.

"Wal, I reckon not," he answered. "How in thunder could he know anything 'bout it?"

"Why, aren't the major and Black Bill on pretty intimate terms?"

"Not as ever I heered on."

"Perhaps it is Archibald Crawford and the major who are such great friends, then?"

"Mebbe it is, but I wil' never tell yer!"

"You have given all the information you possess?"

"Every mite! I told you I would make a clean breast of it, and I have. I am a man of my word, and you can bet high on it! This has been an awful bad biz for me," the ruffian added, with a mournful shake of the head. "I had as good a leetle gang for solid business as kin be scared up in the West, and now it is busted all



to smash. I reckon I will have to emigrate, too, for after it comes to Black Bill's knowledge that I have gone back on him, this won't be a healthy location for me."

"You can thank your lucky stars that you have got off with a whole skin," Teton Tom remarked. "And if I had not been anxious to discover who it was that instigated this attack against me I should not have had much mercy upon you."

"Oh, wal, a miss is as good as a mile," the outlaw remarked with the air of a philosopher. "And now, I reckon that I will have to call upon you to fulfill your part of the bargain, seeing as how I have done mine."

"All right; I am ready."

Then Teton Tom summoned the Indian, and he removed the handcuffs from the wrists of the outlaw.

"Now I am off," said the fellow, with a sigh of relief. "And, Mister Teton Tom, lemme give you a bit of advice at parting. 'If you reckon to buck up ag'in' Black Bill Ricolls, you had better git a good ready on when you start, 'cos you will find him a tough customer to climb.' And then the outlaw departed."

Teton Tom and the Indian followed the ruffian from the hut and watched him ride away.

"Do you know the road to Fort Logan?" the adventurer asked, as the outlaw disappeared from sight.

The Indian answered in the affirmative.

"I want you to conduct me there, then you can return to your tribe, and to the Crow chieftains you can say that it will not be many moons before the White Crow is again with his red brothers."

The red-skin promised to do so, and then the two set out for Fort Logan.

It was Teton Tom's purpose to have the deserter charge settled as soon as possible.

It was his calculation that the soldiers, after having been deprived of their prisoner, would not go on to Fort Logan, but return to the post from whence they started.

On arriving at Fort Logan, he found that he had guessed correctly.

To Colonel John MacLane, the grizzled old veteran in command of the post, he made known his business, and the aged warrior was extremely surprised.

"Bosh! what utter nonsense!" he exclaimed, in his abrupt and vigorous way. "You are no more like the man than I am. He was a tall, lathy fellow, with a milk-and-water face, and the general air of a sneak!"

"Would you mind giving me a letter to Major Cadwallader to that effect?" the adventurer asked.

"Certainly not!" the veteran replied, promptly. "And as I have to send a courier with dispatches to Fort Fremont to-day, I will write a personal letter to Major Cadwallader, telling him that these rascals who swore you were the deserter lied most grossly."

Teton Tom thanked the veteran, and withdrew.

To the Indian he explained that his business was settled, and he should return to Bearfoot Bar at once.

"One Tree will go with the White Crow!" the red-skin announced. "While his brother has been talking with the big pale-face chief, the Crow warrior has been thinking. The White Crow has enemies—he is here in the land of strangers—shall not his red brother go with him and be in readiness to contend with his foes?"

Teton Tom reflected for a moment.

The idea was certainly a good one. There was no doubt that the odds against him were great, and the aid of a good fighting-man, like the Crow chieftain, was not to be despised.

So the adventurer told the red-skin that he fully appreciated his offer and would be glad of his aid.

Teton Tom did not start immediately for Bearfoot Bar, although his business at Fort Logan was completed, but he waited for a day so as to give time for the dispatch-bearer to reach Fort Fremont.

He watched the soldier depart, and then, some hours afterward, followed leisurely in his track.

It was night when he reached Bearfoot Bar, and his entrance into the saloon of the hotel created great surprise, for it was totally unexpected.

Young George Haven shook the hand of his friend vigorously, delighted to see him again, and the miners who crowded around loudly expressed their pleasure.

"I was afraid you had fallen into a trap which might prove fatal!" George Haven exclaimed.

"That I was not killed was no fault of the men who planned the snare," the adventurer replied. "But though the squeeze was a tight one yet I managed to pull out without being damaged, and now I propose to make it warm for the men who put up the job."

The miners looked at each other in astonishment.

"Oh, you may stare, fellow-citizens, but it is the truth!" Teton Tom continued. "I have been the victim of a deep-laid plot, and that I

am not a dead man now is because the snare did not work the way it was expected to work."

"This charge that I was a deserter was a part of the scheme, but here is a letter from Colonel MacLane, of Fort Logan, which settles that."

And then the adventurer read the veteran's letter aloud.

"That settles that, and now, gentlemen, I here give public warning that I am on the track of the men who have attempted to murder me, and soon they will have to step up to the captain's office and settle!"

Amazement was written on the faces of the miners as they listened to the bold words.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### CHERRY SPEAKS.

AFTER astonishing the inmates of the saloon with his bold declaration, Teton Tom went to the cigar-stand, George Haven keeping him company.

Cherry received him with a gracious smile.

"I am glad to see you back again," she said.

"Thank you," Teton Tom responded with an answering smile. "I am glad that there is some one in Bearfoot Bar who is pleased to see me, for I fancy there are not many here who are friends of mine."

"Oh, I do not believe the citizens at large have anything against you!" the girl declared.

"That may be true; there is no reason why they should have, but from the dead set that has been made at me I am satisfied that there are some men in the camp who are my bitter enemies."

The girl cast a rapid glance around, but it was done in such a careless way that if any one had observed it they would not have been apt to suspect that the girl's idea was to ascertain if she could speak freely without danger of being overheard.

Circumstances were favorable, though; the miners had gathered in groups, were busy in conversation, and none of them were near enough to the cigar-stand to overhear what was said.

"Do you like mild or strong cigars?" the girl asked, as she opened the case.

"Mild."

"I think some of these will suit you."

And she took out a handful and placed them upon the glass for inspection; and then, in the same commonplace tone, without any change of expression, she continued:

"You are right; there are men in this camp who are foes to you, and they would not hesitate a moment in striking at your life if a favorable opportunity presented itself."

Teton Tom took up some of the cigars and pretended to examine them, so that if any one noticed that he was in conversation with the dashing Cherry they would think he was discussing the merits of the cigars.

"You are correct in regard to that," he observed, "for the attempt has already been made. The gang who rescued me from the soldiers did so that they might be able to put me to death. By a lucky chance I succeeded in escaping from the trap, and was able to turn the tables on the leader of the band so as to force him to a confession, and thus I learned who it was that had plotted my death."

A shade passed over the girl's face in spite of her wonderful self-control.

She felt that the expression of her features was betraying the interest she took in the conversation, and so she bent over the case and took out another handful of cigars.

"I know what you discovered," she remarked. "Since your departure I, too, have learned that your foes desire your death, and one of them, not knowing that I was near enough to overhear his words, declared that the trap which he had arranged was so cunningly devised that it could not fail, and that you were as good as a dead man already."

"I think I could name the man who made that remark."

"Yes, I have no doubt you can; but it is not my fault; you ought not to blame me for his actions," the girl said, plaintively.

"Oh, I do not; but I regret that matters are as they are, for I cannot remain passive. I have been attacked, and now that I have ascertained who it is who dealt me the blow, I propose to strike back."

"You are right; no one can blame you for so doing."

"I have been attacked without reason—a stranger to the camp, I have not given any provocation."

"Oh! don't you know why it is that you have been attacked?" the girl asked, surprised.

"I know of no reason why my death should be desired by any one in this camp."

"It is because your secret has been discovered," Cherry explained.

"My secret?"

"Yes; without intending to play the listener I overheard a few words of a conversation in regard to you. The men who now control the Black Snake Mine believe you to be a son of the Colonel Crawford who originally discovered the property, and they think your mission here is to endeavor to get possession of the mine and to revenge the death of your father."

"These men, then, are answerable for the death of Colonel Crawford," Teton Tom remarked. "For if they were not they would not be afraid of being called to an account. But they are wrong in their surmise as to my being young Crawford. My name is Thomas Teton. It is the only one I have ever been known by, and so they are away off the track."

"They are fully satisfied that their supposition is correct, though," the girl replied. "And if you are not young Crawford you must prepare to accept the consequences, just the same as if you were."

"Oh, yes, I understand that, and though I am not anxious to assume the responsibility belonging to another man, yet as I have been so fiercely attacked I am going to strike back exactly the same as though I were the man these fellows have taken me to be. I am sorry that this action has been forced upon me on your account, for you took interest enough in me, a stranger, to drop a word of caution, and I hate to be obliged to attack a relative of yours."

"Yes, there is the tie of blood between us, but for years he has not been like a father to me," the girl said, with a low sigh. "And sometimes I think there must be some mistake about the matter, for it does not seem possible that a father would treat a child as he has treated me."

"As near as I can make out he is a merciless ruffian, and I should not be at all surprised at anything he might do," Teton Tom remarked. "The bond of relationship has very little weight with a man of his class."

"It certainly seems so."

"As I said before, I am sorry on your account that I have to call him to a reckoning, but I have stood all I intend to stand, and I think it is about time that these fellows were made to comprehend that this one-sided war has come to an end, and I now propose to hold them responsible for what has been done. If there should be trouble, though, and you are deprived of your natural protector by my hand, I should consider myself in duty bound to look after you."

"My natural protector!" and the full lips of the girl curled in scorn as she uttered the words. "Indeed, he has done but little for me during the past fifteen years. Just as soon as I was able to I was made to earn my own living, and before that time the people who took care of me did so out of charity, for although my father agreed to pay for my keeping he never did, but the people took an interest in me, and so did not abandon me to the cold mercies of the world. Why, for months at a time I never heard a word from him, and did not know whether he was alive or dead. Is it a wonder, then, that I do not feel for him the affection which a child should have for the parent?"

"Indeed, it is not strange; in fact, in my opinion, it would be stranger far if you did experience a daughter's affection for him."

"Yes, that is true. He has been harsh and stern to me ever since I can remember, and if he is my father has never acted like one."

The conversation was interrupted at this point by the entrance of the very man of whom they were speaking.

Black Bill Ricolls swaggered into the saloon in a way that immediately suggested the idea that he had come on mischief bent.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### IN COUNCIL.

AND now that the reader may understand how it was that Black Bill Ricolls happened to make his appearance in the saloon at this particular time, and why he entered in such a warlike manner, we must relate the particulars of an interview which took place in the office of the Black Snake Mine, a short time previous to Black Bill's appearance in the saloon.

In the office sat Archibald Crawford and Black Bill.

The latter had just entered.

"Any news?" asked Crawford, eagerly.

"Not yet," Black Bill responded, as he helped himself to a seat. "But it is hardly time."

"Well, I don't know about that," Crawford responded, thoughtfully. "It seems to me that we ought to have heard something about the matter ere this."

"Oh, no; you are in too much of a hurry. I did not reckon to hear anything until to-morrow; in fact, not until to-morrow night."

"I do not understand why there should be any delay about the matter!" Crawford exclaimed, in an impatient way. "Everything seems to have gone all right, just as we arranged. The soldiers returned and reported that the prisoner had been taken out of their hands and carried away by a gang of masked men; that showed that our scheme had progressed successfully, and after the fellow was carried off, the gang ought to have put him out of the way in short order."

"That was how it was arranged, and as my man is a fellow who can be depended upon, and was well paid to do the job, there isn't any doubt that he speedily made an end to this Teton Tom as soon as he got him in a convenient place."



"Why this delay, then, in hearing about the matter?"

"Oh, well, the man doesn't think there is any particular hurry, I reckon," Black Bill replied. "He has done the job all right and will soon turn up to claim the rest of his money. I only paid him a quarter down, and the balance he was to have when he brought me proof that Teton Tom was dead. The fellow is pretty square—that is, I have always found him so, but in a case of this kind I wouldn't trust my own brother, so I told him I should hold on to the money until I was sure the job had been completed."

"You were wise, for a man who is rascal enough to undertake such a piece of work would not be apt to hesitate if he got a chance to cheat you."

"Well, I don't know about that," Black Bill responded. "That's a good deal in the old saying about honor among thieves, you see. From what I know of the galoot I think he would be apt to keep faith in a matter of this kind; and then, too, the thought that if he didn't he would have me after him, would be apt to make him toe the mark."

"In my opinion his fear of you would be more apt to make him live up to his agreement than any sentiment of honor that he may possess," Crawford remarked.

A grim smile appeared upon the swarthy face of Black Bill, and he nodded his head significantly.

"Maybe you are right about that," he observed. "Men who know me are not anxious to have me get after them, and this galoot knows me like a book. We worked in cahoots once, and he understands that I am not a man to be trifled with. Everything is going on all right, and by to-morrow night we will probably get word that Mister Teton Tom has cashed in his checks for good."

"I hope so!" Crawford exclaimed. "To my mind, there is no doubt that he is a dangerous man, and one who would be certain to work us harm if the opportunity was offered him."

"He's a good man; it would be safe to bet on that, and I agree with you that he might have made a good deal of trouble for us if we had not acted so promptly," Black Bill assented.

At this point the conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Major Cadwalader.

The major was in plain clothes, and wore the broad-brimmed soft hat common to the regiment.

There was a peculiar expression upon the soldier's face as he entered, and both of the inmates of the apartment immediately jumped to the conclusion that he was the bearer of unwelcome tidings.

"Good-evening, gentlemen," said the major, upon entering. "Any news of our man yet?" and he took a chair as he spoke.

"No, nothing," Crawford replied. "We were just discussing the matter, and Bill thinks that it is hardly time yet for us to hear anything, although I think it is."

"You are right, Crawford; it is time for us to hear something," the major remarked, decidedly.

The others looked surprised at the tone in which the major spoke.

"I suppose you wonder why I am so certain about the matter," the soldier continued. "But I have good reason to be, as you will soon see. A courier from Colonel MacLane, of Fort Logan, came in late this afternoon, and, among other dispatches, brought me a letter from the colonel wherein he states that I made a mistake in arresting Teton Tom on the supposition that he was the deserter, Robert Raymond, for not only was it true that he was not the deserter, but he did not bear the slightest resemblance to the man, and the soldiers who swore to his being Raymond willfully lied. Then he relates how Teton Tom had come straight to Fort Logan, and secured a personal interview with him so as to disprove the charge."

"Well, darn me if this ain't one of the queerest things that I ever heard of in my time!" Black Bill exclaimed.

"Yes, and it goes to show that in some mysterious way the fellow managed to escape from the trap which we laid for him," Major Cadwalader remarked.

"It is strange, but I have had an apprehension all along that all would not be plain sailing," Crawford remarked. "Bill can tell you that I have been worried about the matter."

"Yes, that is true enough, but I reckoned everything was all right, for I had a deal of faith in the man I picked out to do the job," Black Bill observed.

"There has been a slip-up somewhere," the soldier asserted. "There is no doubt that Teton Tom was taken away from the soldiers by the gang all right, just as we planned, but the fellow evidently contrived to get away from his capturers and made straight for Fort Logan, where he succeeded in settling this deserter charge so that it could not be brought against him again."

"I tell you, gentlemen, this man is a dangerous one!" Crawford exclaimed. "When we did not hear to-day in regard to the matter, I felt sure that the plot had miscarried,

and now the first thing we know this Teton Tom will be in the camp again."

"Oh, yes, undoubtedly," the major assented. "Well, we must sharpen our wits and try some other game. Because the fellow has succeeded in getting the best of us so far is no reason why we will not beat him in the long run."

The opening of the door interrupted the conversation, and Long Pete Logan, the landlord of the Golden Star Hotel, made his appearance.

From the way the landlord bustled into the room the others judged that he came with important information, and they looked anxiously at him.

"Well, gents, the galoot has turned up!" he announced.

"Not Teton Tom?" Crawford cried.

"That very identical cuss! Large as life and twice as natural!" the landlord declared.

The conspirators looked at each other and an expression of disgust was on each face.

"He has not only come, gents, but he has come ugly, too."

"Aha! he has, eh?" cried Black Bill, and he doubled up his fists in a menacing manner.

"Oh, yes, he is just as ugly as kin be," Long Pete declared. "He says he has been attacked, and he reckons that he won't stand it no longer! Oh, he is on the war-path, and is going to make it lively for the men who have been arter him."

"Gentlemen, I reckon I will have to wade in and climb this galoot!" Black Bill remarked.

"Oh, that reminds me!" exclaimed the landlord, "hyer is a letter which a man left at the hotel for you."

Black Bill opened the note, cast a hasty glance over it and then said:

"Gents, I reckon this hyer will interest all of you; jest keep your ears open!"

And then Black Bill read the letter aloud.

It was a miserably-written scrawl, and ran as follows:

"DERE PARD:—

"The thing has gone up the spout. The cuss got me in a tite place, an' I had to squeel; he will be arter you; keep yer eye peeled. No more from

"Yours truly,

"TOUGH BILL."

"This explains the mystery!" Crawford exclaimed.

"Did you say this hyer Teton Tom was in your saloon?" Black Bill asked as he put the letter in the flame of the candle and watched it burn.

"Yes, he is thar."

"All right; I will be thar too in a brace of shakes, and then I reckon thar will be music in the air. No need for this galoot to hunt me, for I will save him the trouble by hunting him."

And this is how it happened that Black Bill Ricolls made his appearance in the saloon in so threatening a manner.

### CHAPTER XXX. THE ACCUSATION.

"It is my father and he comes on mischief bent, I am certain!" Cherry exclaimed, hurriedly, to Teton Tom the moment Black Bill made his appearance.

"It looks like it, and as I am in all probability the game he seeks I must be ready for war," Teton Tom remarked, putting down a coin in payment for the cigars, and turning around so as to be in readiness to face the new-comer.

Black Bill gave a contemptuous glance toward the two friends and then marched up to the bar.

"It is my treat, boys!" he exclaimed, "and I want every gentleman in the house to waltz up to the bar and name his p'ison."

Such an invitation is always cheerfully accepted whether the giver stands in the palatial bar room of civilization or in the den common to the frontier.

The miners ranged up along the bar, the two pards being the only men in the room who did not respond to the invitation.

Black Bill had his eyes upon them and was quick to notice this fact.

"What is the matter with you two galoots?" he cried, angrily. "Ain't you got ears in your head—don't you understand good United States language when you hear it?"

"Do you suppose I would drink with such a miserable scoundrel as you are?" Teton Tom exclaimed, pulling his revolver from its holster as he spoke.

The adventurer had noticed that Black Bill had his right hand in the side-pocket of his coat and conjectured that the hand grasped a revolver, but by this prompt movement he prevented the other from taking him at a disadvantage.

It would hardly be possible now for Black Bill to get "the drop" on him.

Old and experienced as was Black Bill in border warfare he was somewhat bothered by Teton Tom's action. It had been his game to provoke a quarrel and then secure first fire, thus giving him a chance to settle his man without much trouble.

The scheme could not be worked now, for, with his opponent prepared for war, it would not be possible for him to draw his weapon without exposing himself to the risk of being shot.

"What do you mean by calling me a scoundrel and drawing your we'pon on me?" Black Bill demanded, assuming an aspect of virtuous indignation. "Is it your game to pick a quarrel and then murder me without my being allowed a chance to defend my life? No one but the biggest kind of a coward would try such a game as that!"

"You are a good man to talk about anybody playing the coward," Teton Tom declared.

"And about killing people without giving them a chance for their lives! You miserable rascal! didn't you hire tough Bill Hickman and his gang to murder me, and wouldn't I be in my grave now if I had not been lucky enough to get the best of the fight?"

"That is a lie from 'way back!" Black Bill replied, scornfully. "And if Tough Bill Hickman said so he is a durned liar, and you don't dare to bring him face to face with me."

"That is a safe declaration for you to make, for you know well enough that there is no chance of my being able to do such a thing," Teton Tom retorted. "Tough Bill has taken himself off, and he is not likely to be seen in these parts again for awhile. I have broken up the band he commanded; two of his best men were killed in the fight, and that settled Tough Bill as far as this district is concerned."

Black Bill listened in amazement, for there was no doubt in his mind that the other spoke the truth.

What kind of a man was this who had succeeded in not only escaping from the hands of the outlaws, but had managed to disperse the ruffian band?

"Oh, I reckon you are laying it on pretty thick now," he declared, after a moment's pause. "It is all very well for you to brag 'bout doing a heap of big things, but I reckon this hyer camp ain't going to take any stock in anything that you may say without you have the proof to back it up."

"Well, as to that, it is a matter of small moment to me as to whether I am believed or not," Teton Tom rejoined. "But I am prepared to amply back up what I said a moment ago about you. You are a cowardly scoundrel, who has sought to have me killed by hired assassins, instead of coming out and meeting me boldly like a man; you are the fellow who instigated the two ruffians to attack me right after I arrived in the camp, instead of coming forward and attending to the work yourself; but now, after this last attack, when you hired a whole gang of outlaws to kill me, I have made up my mind to make you come to the front and face the music."

"You needn't be afeard but what I will do it!" Black Bill declared, blusteringly. "I reckon no man ever invited me to step up to the captain's office without finding me ready to break my neck to get thar, and that is the kind of a hairpin I am. All I ask is a fair show for my money. As to my setting men on to attack you, it is all bosh; what have I got against you, anyway? You are a stranger to me, and there is no reason why I should want to harm you."

"Oh, yes, there is!" Teton Tom replied, immediately. "And you must not fall into the error of thinking that I don't understand the game, for I do. The man you hired to murder me, Tough Bill Hickman, got caught in his own trap, and in order to get out of the hole he made a clean breast of it. It is you and the other Black Snake Mine men who are attacking me, because you believe that I am George Crawford, the son and heir of Colonel Randal Crawford, the original owner of the Black Snake Mine."

This announcement created a deal of excitement, and all gazed with curiosity upon the speaker, while Black Bill's face grew dark with rage.

"It is a lie!" he declared, his voice hoarse with passion.

"No, it isn't!" Teton Tom retorted. "It is the truth, and you know it! But you are wrong in your supposition that I am George Crawford, but now that you and your backers have forced this quarrel on me, I am willing to fight you just as if I was. I propose to begin with you, and then attack the men who are at your back, one by one!"

"That is a lie I say!" Black Bill cried. "There are no men at my back. I always paddle my own canoe, and as to my being concerned in any plots against you, it isn't so. I don't care two wags of a mule's tail what Tough Bill Hickman said! Everybody that knows anything 'bout him knows that a bigger liar than that galoot never was seen in Montana. If he tried any games on you and got left, there isn't any doubt that he would swear to anything to get out of the scrape, for that is just the kind of a galoot he is."

"No matter how big a liar the fellow may be, I am satisfied he told the truth when he declared that you were the man who set the trap to catch me, and that the trick was worked because it was believed I was George Crawford, and had come to Bearfoot Bar with the idea of making a fight for the Black Snake Mine. His confession opened my eyes at once, for I suspected that a dead set was being made at me, although it was a puzzle why I should be singled out. You, of course, was at the back of this



deserter charge; that was a cunning trick to get me out of the way, and as soon as I get through with you it is my intention to call Major Cadwalader to an account for his share in that business. I mean to teach him that he cannot walk over a free American citizen, if he is a major in the United States Army."

"Oh, you think you are going to git away with me then, without much trouble!" exclaimed Black Bill, angered beyond measure by the—to him—arrogant assumption.

"I reckon I am good for you!" Teton Tom replied.

"Come outside—give me a fair show, and if I don't fix you for planting, I won't want a cent!" Black Bill declared.

"Go ahead! I'll give you all the show you want. Go up the street fifty or sixty feet, and then the moment I make my appearance, you are welcome to commence the fun."

This was not exactly what Black Bill wanted, but as it was the best he could do under the circumstances, he accepted the situation with a good grace.

Out into the street he marched, followed by about all the inmates of the saloon, anxious to see the fight.

#### CHAPTER XXXI. THE DUEL.

It was some time since the camp had been favored with a contest of this sort, and the miners hurried after Nicolls, desirous of securing good places to witness the show.

There was a full moon, bathing the town in a flood of silver light, so that everything was about as visible as by day.

A better night for a duel could not be wished.

The moment he got out of the house, Black Bill drew his revolver and raised the hammer, so as to be in readiness for the coming struggle.

He did not meditate any sharp practice, for the unwritten law of the *duello* which rules in the wilds of the West would have held him guilty of murder had he done so.

As well as any man living Black Bill knew the laws which govern an encounter of this kind, and now that he had agreed to meet Teton Tom in a fair and open fight, he knew he must not try to secure any advantage by underhand means.

Up the street he marched, some thirty paces, then halted and wheeled around.

By this time Teton Tom was in the street.

He walked straight from the door to the middle of the road, revolver in hand, and, turning, faced his antagonist.

The miners were ranged along the sides of the street, all keeping well in by the buildings so as to avoid being hit by a stray ball, although in a fight of this kind, the fighters being good men, there was not much danger.

"Are you ready?" asked Black Bill, after the adventurer had taken his position.

"All ready! go ahead as soon as you like."

And as Teton Tom spoke, he leveled his revolver and took careful aim at his antagonist.

Black Bill Ricolls was a fair revolver-shot, but not a champion marksman, and as in pacing the distance he had miscalculated, being over seventy feet from Teton Tom in place of fifty, to inflict a deadly wound upon his opponent, as he intended, required no mean skill, particularly as the adventurer, well posted in all the tricks appertaining to the *duello*, was standing sideways so as to present as bad a mark as possible; Black Bill, on the contrary, stood almost squarely facing his opponent.

The two revolvers were discharged almost simultaneously.

Black Bill's bullet whistled within a foot of Teton Tom's head—a good line shot, but too high; the adventurer's lead went truer to the mark, striking Black Bill full in the breast.

Ricolls threw up his hands, gasped, and then fell forward on his face.

The crowd waited for a moment in almost breathless impatience, but as Black Bill did not stir after falling, there was a rush to his side, it being the general impression that he was dead.

The camp doctor was in the crowd, and he made a speedy examination of the fallen man.

"He is not dead," he announced, "but I reckon he is so badly hurt that he is mighty near it."

"Gentlemen, I call on you all to witness that this was a square fight and that I took no undue advantage!" Teton Tom exclaimed.

"That's so—that's so!" came in a sort of chorus from the crowd.

"And now I want to make a public proclamation—I want the citizens of Bearfoot Bar to understand that I have been attacked in the most outrageous manner, and I hold all the principal men connected with the Black Snake Mine responsible for the attack, and I shall not be satisfied until I have called them to a personal account; also Major Cadwalader of Fort Fremont. I am not George Crawford, as these men imagine, but I am ready to take up the quarrel just the same as if I were the heir of Colonel Randal Crawford.

"In my opinion the men who now control the Black Snake Mine are a lot of thieves, and

they have no more right to the property than they have to the whole camp of Bearfoot Bar!"

This bold and warlike declaration astonished the miners. Never since the foundation of the camp had a more defiant speech been delivered in its streets.

"This is my say-so, gentlemen, and I stand ready to make every word good at any time I may be called upon!" Teton Tom declared.

Then he returned to the hotel saloon, where he held a regular levee until he got away from his admirers by going up-stairs with his companion, Burke.

Black Bill was carried to the Black Snake Mine on a shutter, and deposited in his bunk in the cabin which he occupied on the property.

Long Pete Logan, the landlord, had assisted the doctor and the "boys" in taking care of the wounded man, and after Black Bill was placed in his bunk, the others were dismissed, the landlord remaining. Archibald Crawford and Major Cadwalader, who had lingered so as to learn the result of the fight, had come forth when the procession approached and were now standing by the bedside of the wounded man.

The doctor, who was a tolerably skillful fellow—one of the wild blades driven to the frontier by drink and dissipation—made a careful examination of the wound. Black Bill was still insensible, not having recovered from the shock occasioned by the ball—then he shook his head in a manner that excited the apprehensions of the others.

"A dangerous wound, eh, doctor?" Crawford asked.

"You can bet your life on that, gentlemen, and it will be wonderful if the man pulls through. I can't feel the ball, and I don't dare to probe for it. If I was going to venture any wealth on this thing I reckon I would back old Death this time, for it looks as if he had a copper-fastened cinch on Black Bill."

"It was Teton Tom who shot him," the landlord explained.

"Then if Bill dies, Teton Tom's neck will be in danger!" Crawford cried.

"Oh, no, not at all!" exclaimed the doctor. "It was the fairest kind of a fight. I saw the affair from beginning to end. And that reminds me, I stuck Anaconda George for the drinks, for he had an idea that Black Bill would get away with the sport and, jest for greens, I bet him the drinks that he wouldn't."

Then the doctor proceeded to bandage the wound; the others watched the proceeding in silence, their faces gloomy with thought.

When the operation was completed, the doctor said:

"There, that is about all I can do at present. I will go to my cabin now and fix up a mixture for him, perhaps by the time I get back he will be in a condition so I can try to extract the ball, although it is not very probable," and with these words he departed.

The landlord hastened to explain to the others all that had occurred.

"He has thrown off the mask, and now it is war to the knife!" Crawford exclaimed.

"The fellow is going to call me to an account, is he?" observed the major, his stern face sterner than ever.

"His easy victory over Bill has made him reckless," the landlord remarked. "He evidently thinks he can whip the whole town now."

"He will speedily find that he cannot dare me with impunity!" the major declared.

"Don't you trouble yourself about the matter, Crawford; let me attend to this boaster, and if I do not make him sing another tune before he is four-and-twenty hours older, then my name is not Cadwalader!"

#### CHAPTER XXXII.

##### PREPARING FOR BATTLE.

AFTER getting up-stairs to their room and making all secure for the night, the two pards sat down to deliberate in regard to the future.

"You have declared war now," Burke observed. "Your speech will be carried straight to the Black Snake men, and they undoubtedly will be after us as soon as they can get ready."

"That is exactly what I expect," Teton Tom answered. "In reality the Black Snake men have been after us ever since we struck the town. Our little game of coming to this camp and looking around quietly to note how matters stood did not work at all. In some mysterious way we were spotted and our errand known as soon as we struck the town."

"That is true, and the joke of the thing is that it is you who are suspected of being the son of Colonel Crawford."

"Yes, I am aware of that fact. No one appears to suspect that you are the heir."

"It arises from the fact that the old-timers here, men who were acquainted with my father, think that you bear a wonderful likeness to him," Burke explained. "During your absence two of the old citizens—men who were well acquainted with my father, took pains to seek me for the purpose of gaining information in regard to you. Of course I said that you were not George Crawford, and that I was certain of

it, but my positive assurance did not convince these men; they shook their heads, said, 'Maybe they were wrong, but they reckoned that they wasn't,' and then they departed, not at all satisfied."

"Yes, it is rather odd," Teton Tom commented, apparently paying little heed to the incident.

"Now that affairs have progressed so rapidly, we shall have to change our game and play in an entirely different manner from what we had calculated upon," he continued. "We have openly declared war upon the Black Snake men, and I think the next move will be to proclaim that you are George Crawford, and that you claim the Black Snake property by virtue of being the son of Colonel Randal Crawford."

"No doubt they will laugh the claim to scorn," the other remarked.

"Let them! There is an old proverb which says, 'He laughs best who laughs last,' and there is a deal of truth in it. Of course, your setting up a claim to the mine does not amount to much without you make some effort to get possession of the property."

"Certainly, that goes without saying," Burke observed. "But what effort can be made under the circumstances? I fancy there would be little use in appealing to a court of law, for a sheriff and his posse would have no terrors in a region like this."

"You are right; the prospect of a lawsuit would not worry these fellows much; it is a far cry from here to the nearest court, as the Scotch say, and Justice, being blind, would be apt to have considerable difficulty in finding her way amid these Montana wilds," Teton Tom remarked with grim humor.

"This is the country where men take the law in their own hands," he went on, "and settle such little disputes as this by force of the strong arm. To alter the saying of the first Napoleon a little, in Montana the law is on the side of the heaviest artillery. The best armed force will win the game every time. It is an old legal maxim that possession is nine points of the law; in the mining region it is generally ten—the whole game."

"Very true, and as the foe are in possession, our fight will be a difficult one—the advantage is on their side."

"Not a doubt of it! They hold the property by force of arms. Well, we must raise an army, too; we must fight fire with fire; that is the only course to be pursued. We must make public proclamation that you are George Crawford, the son and heir of Colonel Randal Crawford, that you claim the Black Snake property, and propose to support that claim by all means in your power."

"That will create a commotion."

"Exactly, and if I can force the Black Snake men to attack us, it will be a point gained," Teton Tom declared. "I shall take pains, though, to have a few fighting men engaged, and secure a house to serve as a headquarters, and fortress, before I let the Black Snake people know my game."

"Yes, this is an excellent programme, and I do not see any reason why we cannot carry it out; but, my dear Tom, it is going to be an expensive proceeding; fighting-men cost money, even in the wild West, and I don't exactly see where the sinews of war are coming from. I am sure I cannot raise them."

"Don't let that trouble you," Teton Tom replied. "I will act as minister of finance, and will see that the army-chest is kept well supplied with funds. During my life of adventure abroad, where I played the rôle of a soldier of fortune, I was lucky enough to strike some good things, particularly in India, that land of gold and precious stones, so when I returned to America, I did not come empty-handed by any manner of means."

Young Crawford—as we shall hereafter call him, chopping his false appellation—extended his hand to the other.

"Tom, how shall I ever be able to pay you for this kindness?"

"Oh, well, if you don't know how, don't try," responded the adventurer, with a laugh, returning the warm grip of the other.

Early in the morning the pards set out to secure suitable quarters.

A cabin was soon found; a strongly-built one composed of hewn logs, well calculated to stand a siege.

It was situated on the outskirts of the town in a rather isolated situation, and being on a little elevation, commanded the surrounding country.

"With ten good men I would undertake to hold this house against a hundred, so long as they were not provided with artillery!" Teton Tom declared, quick to perceive with his well-trained soldier eyes the advantages of the position.

The house was secured, and then the pards proceeded to engage their fighting-men.

In a town like Bearfoot Bar, which for its size had a large floating population, there was no difficulty in finding eight good men who were willing to risk their lives in another man's quarrel, provided they were well paid for it.



The eight, with the Crow warrior and the two pards, made a force of eleven men.

"There's luck in odd numbers," Teton Tom observed, jocosely.

"But do you think we will have men enough to cope with the Black Snake gang?" young Crawford asked, evidently a little doubtful.

"Yes, I think so. There are only twenty men, all told, in the mine," Teton Tom replied. "And you can be certain that they are not all fighters; the probability is that there are not more than six or eight of the twenty who can be depended upon to stand up to the rack and hold their own in a desperate fight. The men in the mine have not been selected with especial reference to their fighting abilities, like our fellows."

"When they learn that we have raised a force, they may go in to strengthen their army," Crawford suggested.

"Very true; that will probably be their game, but we have the pick of the camp, and nothing but the refuse is left for them. I am satisfied that with our fellows we can clean out any force that they may be able to bring against us, and if I am mistaken—if they succeed in raising an army so big that we do not stand any chance in the fight, then it will be easy for us to increase our force by recruiting a few more men from some of the neighboring camps. For that matter I can send to the north and get ten or twenty Crow warriors, for I am a son of that tribe, and my red brothers are bound to extend aid to me if I make a demand for it."

Of course in so small a camp as Bearfoot Bar the engagement of so many men, evidently for a warlike purpose, created a deal of excitement.

Nothing else was talked of, and then Teton Tom added fuel to the flame by writing out a proclamation which he caused to be tacked to a large tree which stood in the center of the town.

In this document he made public the fact that the man known as Harry Burke was in reality George Haven Crawford, son and heir of Colonel Randal Crawford; that he claimed the Black Snake Mine and warned the thieves who had stolen the property to vacate within ten days or take the consequences.

It is not wonderful that this document created the greatest excitement that the camp of Bearfoot Bar had ever known, and it was the general opinion that the town was going to see the biggest kind of a fight, and, strange to say, the sporting sharps were rather inclined to back the side whereon Teton Tom was ranged.

#### CHAPTER XXXIII.

##### THE MAYOR CONSULTS THE MAJOR.

As the reader has seen, Teton Tom did not permit the grass to grow under his feet, and the Black Snake men were astounded when the news of the movement was brought to their knowledge.

It was the Irishman, Doc Finnegan, who brought the intelligence. He happened to be down-town at the time when Teton Tom tacked the proclamation to the tree, and was one of the first to read it.

Finnegan had been "under the weather" for some time, indulging in one of his usual sprees, during which he had made his headquarters in one of the lowest dens in the camp, and this was how it happened that he did not come to Black Bill's assistance when he was hurt, and the other doctor was permitted to attend to him.

There's an old saying that two of a trade never agree, and most certainly there was no love lost between the two doctors.

Finnegan made his appearance at the mine on the morning which succeeded the night on which Ricolls was wounded; he was sobering up now, and was something like himself.

The other doctor had just departed, having paid an early visit to his patient, bringing the medicine as he had promised, and after making a careful examination of the wound had declared he could not locate the ball and did not dare to probe for it.

Black Bill by this time had recovered his senses, and was growling like a bear with a sore head.

He was extremely disgusted at the doctor's refusal to endeavor to extract the ball, although he swore like a pirate and protested that he could not endure the pain when the doctor tried to probe the wound, and Finnegan, when he learned what the other doctor had said, and done, declared that he was an ignorant block-head, and that the ball could be taken out.

"It's a wee drop of something to put yez to sleep while the operation is going on that ye'll want," he remarked.

"Me hand is a trifle unsteady now an' I don't dare to risk the operation until I am all right ag'in, do ye mind?" he continued. "Wait until I am meself ag'in an' I'll have that ugly bit of lead out in a jiffy. Don't ye worry, Bill! Take me word for it, you're worth a dozen dead men!"

But despite this consoling assurance Black

Bill did worry, and he did not have as much faith in the Irishman as the others appeared to possess.

"It may be that I am not hard hit," he growled, "but I am afraid I am. One thing is certain, I am feeling the torments of the damned, my blood seems turning to liquid fire, and I know I can't stand this agony many hours longer!"

"I'll give ye something to put yez to sleep, so as to give nature a chance to git in her fine work," the Irishman remarked.

Then he administered an opiate which speedily put the wounded man to sleep.

Archibald Crawford was amazed by the news brought by Finnegan, particularly in regard to the declaration that Harry Burke was the son of Colonel Crawford, for he, like the rest, had been led by the resemblance that Teton Tom bore to the colonel to believe him to be the son.

"The scuts m'ane business, too, be jabbers!" Finnegan declared, and then he told of how Teton Tom had enlisted an army.

Crawford's face wore an anxious look, and after meditating over the matter he determined to ride over to Fort Fremont and consult Major Cadwalader in regard to the affair, but before he went he was careful to put the mine on a war-footing.

He sent for the marshal, Anaconda George, and asked him if he had heard of Teton Tom's move.

The marshal replied in the affirmative, adding that he reckoned there weren't many men in the camp who hadn't, for the thing had created the biggest kind of an excitement.

"Well, as president of the Black Snake Mining Company it's my duty to defend this property, and as mayor of the town I reckon I ought to raise a force to clean out this Teton Tom and his gang, for if he keeps on there will be a riot."

"Yas, it looks now as if thar was going to be a row, for the galoot goes ahead as if he means business," the marshal admitted.

"Will you undertake to raise a crowd and go in to clean this fellow out?" Crawford said, and then perceiving that Anaconda George hesitated to reply, he added: "Of course I expect to pay a good big sum for the service, and you can give large wages to the men whom you enlist."

Anaconda George shook his head slowly.

"Mister Mayor, I reckon you will have to count me out this time," he responded. "I don't see no show for me to go in on this deal, no way."

"Why, how is that, Anaconda?" exclaimed Crawford, in surprise. "You are marshal of the town, and I should think you would jump at the chance to get a job like this with big money in it."

"Wal, now, it is jest like this: if I didn't know the man, mebbe I would; but I have sized this Teton Tom up oncet, and I don't want no more of him in mine, thank you."

"What!" cried the other, in amazement, "you are surely not afraid of the man?"

"Oh, I don't know as it is that exactly," responded the marshal, very slowly. "If so be as how I should run up ag'in' the man, and the game was for me to buckle to him without my being able to git out of it 'sides a clean back-down, I reckon I would go for him for all I was worth, but as to jumping into a row with a galoot like him—Wal, I ain't a-tempting Providence in no sich way. The man who kin down Black Bill Ricolls as easily as this cuss did is a bad man from 'way-back, and don't you forget it!"

Crawford was annoyed, for he had depended upon Anaconda George in this matter.

"Well, I am sorry the fellow has bluffed you so easily," he observed, with a slight sneer.

"Mister Mayor, it is jest hyer: I am too old a gambler to go into any game whar the man I have got to buck ag'in' is playing in big luck, and I know afore I go in that I don't stand no kind of a chance. Mebbe it is kinder showing the white feather, but I can't help it; that is the gait I am going on. You kin git plenty of men who will be glad of the job, no doubt. I reckon either Crooked Smith or Diamond Joe would be jest delighted to hop it, for both of 'em have got a grudge ag'in' Teton Tom, but as far as I am consarned, I don't want none of it in mine."

Crawford tried his best to argue Anaconda George out of the position which he had assumed, but all his eloquence was wasted, so he was reluctantly compelled to send for Crooked Smith to take command of his forces, the marshal promising to do his best to secure some good recruits for him.

"It is a sure-enuff fact, though, that this Teton Tom has got the pick of all the men in the town," Anaconda George remarked, as he took his departure. "I have hearn that he's got nigh onto twenty men, and I reckon that 'bout cleans the town out; but I will do the best I can for you."

A decidedly unpleasant ride had the President of the Black Snake Mining Company, from Bearfoot Bar to Fort Fremont, for all the way he worried over the strong demonstration which the adventurer had made.

Major Cadwalader listened calmly to the recital, and it was apparent from his manner that he was not much alarmed.

"I think you exaggerate the danger," he remarked. "There is no doubt that this fellow is considerable of a desperado, and really means to make an attempt to gain possession of the mine, but I attach little importance to the movement. You are in possession of the property and can easily hold it against any force that he will be able to bring."

Crawford replied that he was not so sure of this, and related the particulars of his failure to secure Anaconda George's assistance.

"Well, Anaconda is a good man and ought to be a good judge," the major admitted. "It may be that there is more in the movement than I think, but I can help you out of the scrape easily enough. If you find that this fellow is about to attack with a force which you cannot beat off, fall back on your mayorship and send for me to preserve the peace. I will stretch a point and come with my troops; the fellow will think twice before he gets Uncle Sam's boys after him."

This idea pleased Crawford immensely, and he said as much.

"You have solved the riddle, undoubtedly," he declared, in conclusion. "The idea of having you and your soldiers take an active part in the affair was one that did not occur to me, but it completely upsets this fellow's scheme."

"Yes, but it will not come to that," the major remarked. "It is my intention to put a spoke into the wheel of this Teton Tom and that right speedily. The fellow has allowed his tongue to wag about me entirely too freely, and I intend to teach him a lesson which will be apt to last him for one while. I told you, if you remember, that you need not allow the rascal to worry you any—that I would attend to him, and, from long experience, you ought to be aware that I am a man of my word."

"Oh, yes, of course."

"Captain Morgan has gone to see this gentleman in order to ascertain what way of taking off will be most agreeable to him," the major said, with a grim smile. "And if he does not show the white feather, I anticipate that by tomorrow noon his career in Montana will come to an untimely end."

And now leaving the pair to finish their conversation, the rest of which was of small importance, we will follow the gallant captain and see how he succeeded in his mission.

#### CHAPTER XXXIV.

##### PLAIN SPEAKING.

CAPTAIN MORGAN accepted the mission to Teton Tom readily enough; in fact, he was highly pleased to think there was a prospect of the adventurer getting into trouble.

He had taken a strong dislike to Teton Tom on Miss Katherine's account. The interest which that young lady evidently took in the stranger was extremely distasteful to the gallant captain.

It was quite a triumph for her when the letter from Colonel MacLane arrived disposing of the deserter charge, and she told her father that she thought he ought make an effort to discover what induced the two soldiers to swear to such a falsehood, but the major replied, with unusual gruffness, that he should not bother himself about the matter; he had something better to do than to trouble himself with the vagaries of a couple of drunken vagabonds. And when Katherine, with all the shrewdness of her sex, suggested that the soldiers were prompted to make the charge by some enemy of Teton Tom's, he scoffed at the idea.

Captain Morgan, too, considered the suggestion to be absurd, and was unwise enough to say so to the girl; and, as a result of this frank disclosure, a decided coolness sprung up between himself and Katherine.

For this he blamed the adventurer, and therefore it was with decided satisfaction that he set out on the hostile errand to Teton Tom.

He found the adventurer at his headquarters, and made the discovery that Teton Tom was proceeding in regular military style.

There were sentinels posted, and he was not allowed to enter the cabin until word was sent and permission obtained.

The captain was decidedly nettled by these proceedings, and felt extremely ill-humored when he was at last ushered into the presence of the man he sought.

"Well, sir, you are hedged around with as much red-tape as though you were the commander-in-chief of an army," the captain remarked, when he came face to face with the adventurer.

"Well, that is really about the position that I occupy at present," Teton Tom replied. "Take a chair, sir, and make yourself comfortable."

The captain sat down.

"But it seems to me that this proceeding of yours is rather unusual—to put it mildly—posting sentinels and interfering with free passage—"

"Upon my own land, sir!" Teton Tom interrupted, coldly. "I believe that a man has the



right to keep trespassers off his property, even by force of arms, if he so elects; I think if you look into the matter you will find that is the law."

"Well, I am no lawyer," the captain replied, seeing that the other had made a point, "so that is a matter which I am not able to decide."

"You will find I am correct, I think. The position I have assumed is not at all out of the way when the circumstances of the case are considered. I am acting for a man who lays claim to a certain mining property. The parties who are now in possession of that property secured control of it by force of arms; to use the Western saying, they 'jumped' the claim, having no more right to the mine than either you or I. This is a case where it is hardly worth while to bother with the law. The thieves took the mine by main force and they ought not to complain if a dose of their own medicine is administered to them."

"Of course, I take no interest in the matter," the captain observed, stiffly. "I know nothing about the facts in the case, and so am not competent to pass an opinion in regard to who is in the right or wrong."

"Oh, I did not look for any expression of opinion on your part," Teton Tom replied. "You are not a citizen here, and, of course, as an officer of the United States Army, you cannot be expected to take any interest in these mining quarrels. But may I ask to what I am indebted for the honor of this visit?"

"Certainly, I have called upon you in behalf of Major Cadwalader."

Teton Tom bowed but spoke not.

"Some rather uncautious speeches made by you have come to the knowledge of the major," the captain continued.

"You astonish me!" the adventurer exclaimed in surprise. "I am generally very careful of what I say, and I am sure I have not made any uncautious speeches about Major Cadwalader, or anybody else, for that matter."

"It is strange," the captain remarked. Being a little dull of comprehension he did not see that what he took to be a denial was no denial at all. "It has been reported to the major that you spoke harshly of him; asserted that he was a rascal in league with your foes, and that it was your intention to call him to an account."

"That is true, every word," Teton Tom declared to the captain's astonishment. "That is exactly what I said, and I mean every word of the speech too!"

"Egad! if you don't call that an uncautious speech what is it?"

"Not at all; I made the speech so that it should be carried straight to the major. I wanted him to understand that I knew the little game he was playing, and intended to call him to an account."

"Well, I must say that this frank acknowledgment of yours simplifies matters," the captain remarked. "The major has sent me to see if you really did speak in this way regarding him."

"I did—what then?"

"Why, if you consider that you have been wronged by him in any way he stands ready to give you satisfaction."

"Do you bear a challenge from Major Cadwalader to me?"

"Oh, no, the major is not sending challenges," Captain Morgan replied, with a lofty air. "It is not of the slightest importance to him what you may say or do. He attaches no weight whatever to any offensive expressions that you may use in regard to him. His position is this: if you think he has wronged you he stands ready to give you the satisfaction of a gentleman, and it seems to me you ought to be contented."

"I reckon the major takes me for a fool if he imagines that I do not see the cunning little game which he is trying to play," the adventurer remarked, contemptuously. "He has been cut to the quick by my declaration that he has acted toward me like a rogue and a rascal, but he does not challenge me because he knows that by the laws of the duello I would have the choice of weapons, and that does not suit him. He wants the challenge to come from me so that he will have the privilege of choosing the arms."

The captain flushed a little, hesitated for a moment and then said:

"Really, I give my word as a gentleman that I do not know what the major thinks about the matter. He requested me to see you and deliver the message which I have delivered."

"But you are empowered by him to make arrangements for a hostile meeting in case I demand one?" Teton Tom asked.

"Well, yes," the captain replied, after a moment's hesitation. "He said at parting that if you demanded satisfaction he supposed it would save time if I accepted the challenge on his behalf and arranged the details of the meeting."

"And he named the weapons?" Teton Tom said, a faint, sarcastic smile curling the corners of his lips as he looked searchingly into the eyes of the other.

"Y—yes, he said he thought rifles at a hundred paces would be as good as anything."

"His favorite distance, I presume, and the weapon of which he fancies he is a master," commented Teton Tom.

"Very nicely arranged, indeed," the adventurer continued. "And if the major can succeed in killing me the thieves who are in possession of the Black Snake Mine can rest secure."

"Now, although I have penetrated Major Cadwalader's plan, and think him a bigger rascal than I before believed him to be, yet I am perfectly willing to meet him on his own terms, thereby giving him all the advantages which he has so cunningly schemed to secure," Teton Tom remarked. "Rifles, at a hundred paces will suit me, and if I do not succeed in making a vacancy in the United States Army, so as to give some man a chance to step into a majorship, it will be because I am not as good a shot as I think I am."

The adventurer spoke with an air of confident assurance that rather astonished the officer, and yet there was nothing of the bragging boaster in his manner; the speech being delivered with the air of a man who knew what he could do, and was not afraid to make it public.

"You challenge Major Cadwalader then?" the captain said.

"Yes, and so give him the right to choose the weapons. You see I do not hesitate to give the major the advantage which he is so anxious to attain," Teton Tom responded. "But tell the major from me that I understand his little game, and if I thought he was going to gain anything by it I should not allow him to work it, but as I feel sure that with the rifle the advantage will be on my side I am perfectly willing to agree to fight with that weapon. Mr. Crawford will act as my second."

Then the adventurer summoned his pard from the inner room, introduced him to the captain, and then explained the nature of his business.

The details of the affair were soon arranged. The duel was to take place on the following morning at six o'clock. The spot, a little plain down the creek, just about half-way between the camp and the fort.

The captain rode back to the post well pleased at his success in arranging matters so easily, yet rather dubious in regard to the result.

"Hang me if I would bet on the major, although I know he is a deuced good shot!" he exclaimed, so impressed had he been by the adventurer.

#### CHAPTER XXXV.

##### A SURPRISE.

"WELL, this is a rather unexpected move, isn't it?" Crawford asked, after the captain departed.

"Yes, although I had an idea when I made the public announcement in regard to the major that it would result in forcing him to make a demonstration," Teton Tom replied.

"You succeeded admirably."

"Oh, yes, Major Cadwalader has come prominently to the front, and his prompt action satisfies me that the suspicions I entertained in regard to his being in league with the rascals who control the Black Snake Mine are correct."

"It certainly seems so."

"I have been inquiring a little into the past history of the major, and I find that about twenty years ago, just about the time when the mine was stolen from your father, that Cadwalader, then a captain, was stationed here at Fort Fremont, and was one of your father's intimate friends."

"And yet now he is apparently acting with the men who robbed my father of his property—who murdered him."

"Well, the idea has come to me that he is heavily interested in the mine now, although he was your father's friend in the long ago," Teton Tom remarked. "I have not seen much of the major, but I think I understand the kind of man he is as well as though I had known him for years. He is a dogmatic, irritable man, used to having his own way and wielding despotic authority; like a good many old soldiers he is disposed to treat civilians with the same harshness as the men under his command, and in this emergency, being nettled by my blunt remarks, he has taken upon himself the rôle of 'Bell-the-cat.' You remember the old fable of how the rats in solemn convention decided that it was necessary for the safety of their race that some one of their number should watch until the cat was asleep and then tie a bell to her neck, so that all the rats would have timely warning of her approach; the idea was thought to be an excellent one, and all agreed that it should be carried out, but the great trouble was to decide who should perform the task, and as no one was willing to take the risk the scheme fell through."

"Yes, I remember the fable."

"In this case, I answer for the cat, and the major is going to attend to me, only the bell he designs for me is a rifle-ball; he is acting for the Black Snake men."

"That is my idea, and they realize that though I am the claimant for the property, yet you are the man who is dangerous, and that if

you are silenced they will have little to fear. It is extremely complimentary to you, but decidedly the reverse for me," Crawford exclaimed, laughing.

"Well, I am the general in command of the forces and of course the shining mark," Teton Tom replied.

"Oh, no, it is not that; your death is sought because in reality you are the head and front of the attack, and the more I think of the matter the more puzzled I become; why should you, a stranger, risk your life and fight for me?"

"Am I not a soldier of fortune?" Teton Tom replied. "Is not war my trade? Like ancient Pistol is not the world mine oyster to be opened with my sword?"

Crawford shook his head.

"Your reasoning doesn't satisfy me," he rejoined. "You are acting in this affair more like one of the old-time knights, who espoused a cause because he believed it to be just, rather than as a soldier of fortune, who usually sells his sword to the highest bidder."

"Never mind discussing the matter now, old fellow," the other replied. "Just you wait until we win the fight and then see what a bill I will bring in for my valuable services."

Crawford laughed.

"Well, if you claimed the entire property I don't know if I should be able to dispute the justice of the demand, for one thing is certain, without your aid I could no more wrest the property from these scoundrels, who robbed my father of it, than I could fly."

"It is not to be expected that a student like yourself should be able to manage a campaign of this kind as well as a man who has seen service in the four quarters of the globe."

At this point the conversation was interrupted by the entrance of one of the guards, who brought the intelligence that Dumb Dickey wanted to speak to Teton Tom.

The old man was soon ushered into the cabin. He nodded, helped himself to a chair, waited until the man departed, then looked around in a mysterious way as though he was afraid some one was playing the spy upon him.

Teton Tom guessed the thoughts that were in the old man's mind, and at once proceeded to reassure him.

"You need not be afraid to speak; we are alone, and no one can overhear what you say."

"That is good, for I come upon very particular business," the old man asserted.

"You can speak freely."

"My life would not be worth an hour's purchase if the Black Snake scoundrels knew the nature of my mission to you."

The pards looked a little surprised at this assertion, although they were inclined to believe it was but an idle fancy of the old man.

"Oh, it is the truth!" he persisted, detecting with wonderful quickness that his listeners were inclined to be incredulous. "Those fellows would take my life in a moment, colonel, if they knew of the important document that I possess."

By the use of the title the pards saw that the old man still clung to the delusion that Teton Tom was Randal Crawford.

"An important document, eh?" Teton Tom remarked, with the idea of humoring the old fellow.

"Yes, I have kept it safely for you, colonel, all these years, for I knew that some day you would return and want it." Then the old man fished out of a secret pocket in the inside of his shirt a small package wrapped up carefully in oiled silk, but after producing the article Dumb Dickey looked carefully around, shook his head and said:

"It is true what I told you, colonel; those villains would not hesitate to kill me if they knew that I was the man who gave this precious package into your hands."

"You need not be alarmed," Teton Tom remarked, reassuringly. "There is no danger of the Black Snake men discovering that you had had anything to do with the matter. Your secret will be safe in our possession."

"You are quite sure that there are no spies lurking near?"

"Oh, yes; set your mind at rest on that point."

"I am not young enough to fight these scoundrels, you know, and if they attacked me I should certainly fall a victim. They are a set of remorseless villains, men who would stoop to any crime."

"You are perfectly safe and can go ahead without fear," young Crawford declared.

"Yes, yes, I hope so," and then the old man studied the face of the heir for a moment.

"So you are George Crawford?" he continued, after quite a pause.

"Yes, that is my name."

Then Dumb Dickey looked at Teton Tom for a moment.

"There is a resemblance—I see it now, although I did not before. Your son, colonel, is worthy of you. I congratulate you on having such a boy."

"Yes, he will pass in a crowd," the adventurer remarked, humoring the old man in his delusion.

"Now, let me give you back this paper, colo-



nel, which I have carefully kept for you all these years."

Unrolling the silk, a roll of paper, yellow with age, was disclosed, the writing faded, yet perfectly legible.

It was the will of Randal Crawford, dated twenty years ago.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### A NEW RECRUIT.

"THE will of Randal Crawford!" exclaimed Teton Tom, completely taken by surprise, as he read the title-line of the document.

"Yes, there it is, all safe, just as you intrusted it to me, twenty years ago, on the night which preceded your attack on the Black Snake Mine. If you remember, colonel, you said you had a presentiment that you might fall in the fight, and you wanted all your affairs straightened out, and so you made this will, leaving all your property to your infant son, George. Why, Lord bless you, colonel, I remember the events of that night as well as though it was only yesterday. You had two witnesses to the will, so that there could be no question in regard to it—Alonzo Williams and Martin Craddock; and, as it happens, both men are alive and in the camp to-day."

Teton Tom knew this statement to be true, for he had met both Lon Williams and Mart Craddock, veteran miners, and men of high repute.

"Well, this is a surprise-party!" the adventurer exclaimed. "And the production of the will materially strengthens our cause, for it shows beyond a doubt that you, George, are your father's legal heir, although, even without this paper, the property would come to you; but the document aids us, for it might be disputed that your father had a son, but this settles that point."

"Yes, yes; I thought it might be of service to you, and that is why I brought it," the old man explained, rubbing his hands together in great glee.

"I will see Williams and Craddock about the matter," Teton Tom observed. "No doubt they will be able to give some valuable information."

"No doubt—no doubt," Dumb Dickey responded, with a wise nod of his head.

At this point the conversation was interrupted by the entrance of the guard, who bore a message that Doc Dick Johnston would like to speak with Teton Tom.

This was the medical man who had been in attendance on Black Bill, and the adventurer, knowing this fact, surmised that he brought some intelligence in regard to that worthy.

The doctor was brought into the apartment, and he exchanged salutations with the occupants.

"How are you, gents? glad to see you!" he remarked. "I reckon, Teton, from the way you are going on that you calculate to make it warm for the Black Snake gang."

From the style in which the doctor spoke the pards jumped to the conclusion that he was not favorably disposed toward their opponents.

"Well, we intend to make it as lively for them as we can," Teton Tom replied.

"I ain't much of a betting man," the doctor observed, reflectively, "yet when I think I see a chance to collar a few ducats without too big a risk I generally am not very backward in coming forward, and I want you to do your level best in this raffle, for I have put my shekels up on your side."

"Is that so?" Teton Tom inquired.

"True as preaching!"

"How is that? I thought you were attending Black Bill, and under the circumstances you ought to bet on his side."

"Oh, no; that hasn't got anything to do with it. I put up my money on you before I was called upon to look after him," the doctor explained. "But I am out of that job anyway. The galoots have sent me word that I need not come any more."

"Is Black Bill entirely out of danger, then?" Teton Tom asked. "I had an idea that he was pretty hard hit."

"Well, now, sport, you can bet your bottom dollar on that, and you will 'call the turn' every time," Dick Johnston declared.

"I had no wish to take the man's life, but, under the circumstances, I was obliged to look out for myself."

"Oh, yes; I saw the hull thing from beginning to end. I was the squarest kind of a fight," the doctor declared. "No one can blame you for plugging the man when he was doing his level best to plug you; but you did not make any mistake about the matter—you put your lead where it will do the most good, and if Black Bill ever gets off the bed which he is now on, it will be a good deal like a miracle, and I reckon miracles ain't worked now as much as they used to be."

"How comes it, then, that you are not wanted—that is strange!"

"It is all along of that drunken Irish fool who thinks he is a doctor—and he claims to be a lawyer, too!" Dick Johnston cried, in a fine burst of scorn. "I reckon the cuss has gall

enough to start in as a preacher, if the camp came to the conclusion to run a church."

"Ah, he has taken the case out of your hands?" Teton Tom observed.

"Yes, and it is all because I would not attempt to extract the ball!" Dick Johnston exclaimed, indignantly. "I don't claim to be away up at the top of the heap as a doctor; I know that there is a great many men who can discount me, but I have had a heap of practice in gunshot wounds since I came to Montana, and it takes a good man to beat me at that game. This Paddy-whack can't do it, for sure! and if he tries to extract the ball, it will be 'good-by, John!' for Black Bill!"

"And is he going to do it?" Teton Tom inquired.

"Yes, that is his say-so, and I told him right to his teeth that if he did, and Black Bill died under the operation, it would be his tool that killed the man and not yours."

"I reckon he didn't relish that."

"You bet he didn't, and we came pretty near carving each other right then and there, but the others interfered, and I left. But I am through with that gang for good and all, and I've dropped in to see if you didn't want a man to go in with you to help clean 'em out. I have got it in for them red-hot, you bet!"

Teton Tom was glad to accept the recruit and then the doctor turned his attention to Dumb Dickey.

"Hello, old man, how do you find yourself?" he exclaimed. "When are ye going to let me make an examination of your head?"

"No, no, no use to trouble you," the old man observed, in a nervous way.

Then, perceiving that the pards were looking at him in an inquiring manner, the doctor proceeded to explain.

"Our aged friend here has a leetle trouble with his head once in a while. The head gets an idea that it don't belong to him, and wants to go off on a jamboree of its own. Now, there's always a reason for a thing of that kind, and the notion came to me that it was possible Dickey had sustained an injury at some time during the past, which displaced a part of the skull, and that a portion of the bone was pressing inward, which would account for his head troubling him sometimes. If such is the case a simple operation would soon make him all right again."

"Oh, yes, no doubt about that; I have often heard of such cases; they are not rare," the adventurer remarked.

"Right you are! the books are full of them!" the doctor declared. "There are plenty of instances on record, too, where a patient suffering in this way has been cured by an accidental fall, the shock of which restored the bone to its normal condition."

"That is true; I have heard of that, too."

"Now if Dickey would only let me make an examination—" the doctor said, in a coaxing way.

"No, no, I know there ain't anything the matter with me!" exclaimed the old man, starting up as though he feared the doctor would use force to accomplish his object. "I will see you again, colonel, after you have whipped this Black Snake gang!"

And then the old fellow hurried away.

"He's as mad as mad can be, on some points, yet sane enough on others," Johnston remarked, as he rose to depart. "I would be willing to put up a good stake that it comes from some injury to his head, and that I could cure him if he would let me try; so long," and away went the doctor.

Teton Tom immediately sent for the two witnesses to the will, and when they came, both remembered the particulars in regard to the document when the circumstance was recalled to their memory, but they were extremely puzzled to understand how Dumb Dickey came to be in possession of the will, or how he knew anything about the affair. According to the best of their recollections, he was not in the camp at the time—in fact, both men were positive that it was fully three or four years after the colonel's death that the harmless old madman made his appearance in Bearfoot Bar.

"It is odd," Teton Tom commented. "And owing to his peculiarities it is not possible to get an explanation out of him. Just oblige me, gentlemen, by keeping quiet in regard to his share in the transaction, will you?"

The pair said they would, and then departed, much amazed at the strange circumstance.

"It is an omen of success for us!" Teton Tom declared.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### BLACK BILL SPEAKS.

ARCHIBALD CRAWFORD sat by the bedside of the wounded ruffian, Black Bill.

The lapse of time had brought no ease to the suffering man, and the manner in which he grumbled and swore was something fearful.

"What is the use of kicking up such a row?" Crawford exclaimed, impatiently. "It will not make the pain of your wound any less."

The speaker had just entered and had been saluted by a torrent of curses.

"Oh, yes, it is all very well for you to talk!"

Black Bill growled. "You are not compelled to lie upon your back, suffering tortures that would be apt to make a saint swear."

"Well, you are no saint; that is one thing that is certain," the other observed.

"Neither are you, if it comes to that!" Black Bill retorted. "I don't pretend to be any better than I ought to be, but I reckon when the devil gets us both, that he will not make it any hotter for me than he does for you."

Crawford laughed contemptuously.

"Oh! you have come to that point, have you? beginning to speculate in regard to what is going to become of you after you have cashed in your checks and gone to another world. Why, Bill, I didn't think you were that chicken-hearted!"

"That's a lie!" cried the wounded ruffian, fiercely. "I have got as much sand as you, or any man you can scare up in a hundred square miles! Who was it that went in to clean out this sport when it became certain that he was going to be dangerous? Was it a man about your size? Oh, no, I reckon not!" And Black Bill's voice had an extremely sarcastic tone.

"Oh, there is no disputing that you volunteered to do the job," Crawford admitted. "You have always been noted for being able to hold your end up with anybody, but from what you said I rather reckoned that you were weakening a little."

"Not by a durned sight!" Black Bill exclaimed, decidedly. "I am jest as good a man as I ever was—have got jest as much sand, and I ain't afeard to pass in my checks, if that is the lay-out that is before me."

"Well, I reckon that there isn't any danger of it. Finnegan says that you will pull through all right, and he ought to know."

"Yes, he ought to," Black Bill admitted, but in a tone that expressed doubt.

"Finnegan is a good doctor; there is no discount on that!" Crawford asserted.

"Yes, when he knows what he is about—when he lets liquor alone, but it seems to me that I haven't seen him really sober at any time for the last three months—"

"Oh, it is not so bad as that, although I think myself that he has been drinking more than usual lately."

"Where is he now?"

"Asleep; he said he wasn't in a good condition to attend to your case and would lay down and sleep the effects of the liquor off, then, when he awoke, he would attend to extracting the ball."

"Do you think it is safe to let him do it?" Black Bill asked, evidently dubious.

"Why, yes, of course!" Crawford replied, immediately. "If I were in your place I would not hesitate for a moment."

"But Dick Johnston said that he did not dare to attempt to git it out?" Black Bill urged. "And Johnston, you know, is a pretty good doctor."

"Yes, but he is a much younger man than Finnegan; he hasn't had the experience of our pard; and then, too, I reckon that Johnston ain't much on the nerve, anyway."

"I don't know how that is; I don't know much about the man, 'cept that I have heered some of the boys allow that he was a ripping good doctor."

"He ain't anxious to rip you though," and Crawford laughed heartily at his jest.

"I reckon that if you was a-laying hyer on yer back like I am, you wouldn't see much to laugh at!" Black Bill declared in a sulky way.

"Oh, that is all right, old man, you will be all over this in a few days!" Crawford exclaimed, reassuringly. "Just as soon as Finnegan gets the lead out, you will begin to pick up."

"But Johnston said the operation was too risky just now; he wouldn't do it, you know."

"He hasn't got the nerve; it is jest as I told you. You can depend upon Finnegan; he knows what he is about, and if the thing is risky he will not try it."

Here the conversation was interrupted by the appearance of the Irishman.

"I'm to the fore ag'in, boys!" he declared. "I am all right now, and I will be afther having that uncomfortable bit of lead out in a jiffy."

"Bill is feeling a little nervous over the matter on account of what Dick Johnston said," Crawford remarked. "Johnston, you know, wouldn't take the ball out—said he wouldn't risk it."

"Small blame to him!" Finnegan exclaimed. "He is not the man to meddle wid any such affair as this; it is not in him, and he is wise enough to know it."

"You think I will pull through all right then?" Black Bill asked.

"Oh, yes, not a doubt of it! It is not a bad wound at all, at all!"

"Wal, I hope I will never have a worse one," Black Bill replied, with a groan.

"By the way, Crawford, who do you s'pose I saw skulking about outside of the works, wid his two eyes peeping at everything?" the Irishman asked, abruptly.

"Haven't an idea!"



"That murdering th'afe of an idiot, Dumb Dickey!"

"Aha! the fellow was spying around in the interest of this Teton Tom, of course!" Crawford exclaimed.

"It is likely. Shure, I think we made a big mistake that we didn't run the scut out of the town a long time ago. It is my bel'afe that he was the one that posted Teton Tom in regard to Randal Crawford."

"Yes, that is my idea, and I am going to make it my business to walk up to this Dumb Dickey's cave some time, and take advantage of a favorable opportunity, when they isn't anybody 'round, to blow the top of his crazy head off!" Crawford declared, with an angry scowl.

"Be the powers! it ought to have been done a long while ago!" Finnegan asserted.

Then the Irishman began to examine the wound, a proceeding which caused Black Bill to groan and swear in a fearful manner.

Finnegan went on, though, regardless of the pain he was causing the wounded man, and soon succeeded in extracting the ball.

Black Bill fainted at the end of the operation, a circumstance which did not disturb the Irishman in the least, although it alarmed Crawford.

"By Jove! I am afraid he is done for, Finnegan!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, no, he is all right. It is a little shock, that is all," the Irishman replied, proceeding to bandage the wound. "He'll come to his senses in a few moments, and then he will improve rapidly."

At this point the daughter of the wounded man, Cherry, made her appearance, and the pair gladly relinquished the wounded man to her care, departing from the house.

It was fully ten minutes before Black Bill recovered his senses.

The shock had been a severe one, and the man was extremely weak; he recognized the girl with a nod and then looked for the men.

"Where are they?" he asked.

"They said there was business to which they must attend," Cherry replied.

"The scoundrels!" muttered Black Bill, "they have left me here to die!"

"Oh, no, father, they said you were in no danger."

"They lied! that infernal Irishman has killed me, and I believe Crawford set him on to do it," the wounded man declared. "I can feel that I am growing weaker and weaker. These scoundrels want me out of the way so that they can get my share of the mine, but I'll strike 'em a blow, even though I am sinking into the grave."

"I hain't been a very good father to you, my girl, but 'twasn't my fault; I wasn't built that way. Your mother was a Crow squaw, but she left me because I ill-treated her and went back to her tribe, taking you with her. I wanted revenge, and when you were a little kid I stole you from the Indian village, not that I cared for you, but I wanted to get squar' with your mother."

"I reckon I'm gitting paid for that, and all my other acts of devilry now," and the sufferer heaved a deep sigh.

The girl hastened to bring him a drink of water, but he refused it.

"I can't swallow anything; I'm a gone coon, and hain't got many minutes left. I reckon these scoundrels want me out of the way. When I'm dead you go to Teton Tom: tell him that it was Archy Crawford, Major Cadwalader and Black Bill who got Randal Crawford's mine away from him. Red Archy and I jumped the claim and Cadwalader fixed the army business so that charges were made at Washington that the colonel had robbed the Government; Cadwalader was his quartermaster—he warn't no major then; Crawford believed he was his friend and trusted him, but the major drank and gambled—was 'way behind in his accounts, but continued to fix it so that it looked as if the colonel was to blame."

"Oh, we worked the game to the queen's taste! If we had only killed the heir in the East at the time Crawford and I went for him—but—Well, I'll put forty dollars on the queen—I'm a good man; no better in Montana—"

His mind wandered; a few more incoherent words, and then death claimed his victim.

Black Bill was at rest at last.

#### CHAPTER XXXVIII.

##### THE HOSTILE MEETING.

THE pards were up early on the following morning; just as the first gray streaks of light began to appear in the eastern skies they sat down to their breakfast, and did full justice to the meal.

"You don't eat like a man with anything on his mind," Crawford observed.

"Oh, I am too old a soldier to be troubled by a little affair of this kind," the other replied. "If I was certain that I was going forth to meet my death, I think I would enjoy my breakfast all the same, on the principle, you know, of making the best of the good things of this life while they can be enjoyed."

"I suppose that is the true way to look at the matter, but it is not every man who can do so," Crawford remarked.

"Oh, I reckon it needs a special training, and that I have had."

"I don't know much about this Major Cadwalader," Crawford observed, thoughtfully. "But from what I have seen of him I should imagine that he would be a rather tough customer in a duel of this kind."

"I have not the least doubt of it, and that is the reason why he has stepped forward to champion the cause of the Black Snake men. I have an idea that he is a silent partner in the mine—in all probability is heavily interested, or else he would not take so much trouble about the matter," Teton Tom remarked. "He was the man that hatched the deserter charge, and that was arranged for the express purpose of giving the outlaw gang a chance to capture me—as they did—when I was sent to Fort Logan in charge of the troopers. It was the major who got the soldiers to swear I was the deserter; then, when I was in the guard-house in the fort, the putting of the drunken fellow in with me, and allowing him to arrange a plan of escape, was another trap. It cost the unfortunate wretch his life, but he was shot by mistake for me."

"Yes, no doubt about it."

"I regard the major as an unprincipled scoundrel, and in this coming fight I shall not hesitate to kill him if I can," the adventurer remarked, with firm determination. "And yet I am anything but a seeker after blood, and hate to take life even in the red heat of battle."

"But in this case it seems to me that you are fully justified," Crawford observed, after thinking over the matter for a moment. "The man has attempted to murder you in the most treacherous and cowardly manner. It is he that really dared you to the field in this contest, after taking care to arrange the matter so that he could secure, what he supposed to be, an advantage. The man deserves to die if ever a mortal did, and if he falls by your bullet, his death will be as the death of the criminal who perishes by the hand of the executioner."

"Yes, I suppose I ought to look at the matter in that light. I am in for it, and have got to go ahead, anyway, and as it is a moral certainty that the major will kill me if he can, I would be the biggest kind of an idiot to spare him."

"Most decidedly."

"Yet, when I think of his daughter, I feel rather queer about the matter," Teton Tom observed, slowly. "I know the father is a bad egg, but I have an extremely favorable opinion of the girl."

"Yes, she impressed me favorably."

"Well, it cannot be helped; as a man makes his bed so must he lie; Major Cadwalader has chosen to be a scoundrel and must take the consequences."

By this time the meal was ended, and the pards began to prepare to depart, and so little did the adventurer trust to the honor of the soldier, that he took the greater part of his army to the field with him, only leaving a couple of men behind to look after the headquarters.

And, early as was the hour, a great many of the miners were astir, and when they beheld the pards march off with their force they came to the conclusion that Teton Tom was going to attack the Black Snake Mine, and they followed after, eager to see the "fun," so by the time that the pards got well out of the town there were twenty-five or thirty men bringing up the rear.

When the party arrived upon the ground, which had been selected for the fight, they found the soldiers waiting for them.

Major Cadwalader was accompanied by Captain Morgan and another officer, who was introduced as the surgeon of the post.

The military men looked with astonishment at the crowd, and Captain Morgan took occasion to remark that he hoped the major was not expected to fight the whole town.

"No, sir, only one man, and that is myself," Teton Tom replied with courtly politeness.

"If I remember rightly there wasn't anything said in the agreement in regard to restricting the number of witnesses who should be present at the fight, and so I took the liberty of bringing a few friends; it was a matter of precaution too. I am engaged in a struggle with desperate men, who will not hesitate to use any and all means to compass my death, and I am too old a bird to be lured into a trap where I could be assaulted by superior numbers and slaughtered. My army is at my back, and, if I am attacked, I can give blow for blow!"

"I can assure you that I would not lend myself to any such proceeding," the captain asserted in an indignant and lofty tone. "No, sir, I give you my word that if any attack was made upon you I would risk my life to defend you!"

"Captain Morgan, I make no charge against you," Teton Tom asserted. "And I am quite willing to believe that you would not descend to any treachery, even though it might aid your principal. And in regard to the greater part of these gentlemen, I beg to assure you that they are not partisans of mine, but honest citizens of the camp who, in some way, learned that a duel was on foot and came to witness the proceedings, and from what I know of the men of Bear-

foot Bar I feel sure that all they desire is a fair fight, and they will not favor either the major or myself."

This was the cue for one of the miners to speak—a grizzled veteran—a man of weight and standing in the town, and he repeated Teton Tom's assurance.

"A fair field, and may the best man win!—that is our platform!" he said, in conclusion.

This matter decided, the seconds proceeded to arrange for the contest.

The distance was measured off and it was settled that after the men were in position words of caution were to be given, and then, at the discharge of a pistol by the old miner, who had been selected for this task, the opponents were at liberty to fire.

"Take yer places, gents!" exclaimed the veteran.

The seconds escorted their principals to their positions.

Teton Tom swung along with his light, nervous tread, wearing as careless an air as a man entering a ball-room, but Captain Morgan noticed that Major Cadwalader seemed a trifle nervous and out of sorts, and this made the captain uneasy, for his commanding officer was usually a man of iron.

"What is the matter, major?" he asked. "It seems to me that you seem a trifle rocky this morning."

"Had a deuced bad night," the major answered. "I don't believe I slept two hours, and yet I went to bed early, too, on purpose to have a good night's rest; but I tossed and tumbled, and the infernal sleep wouldn't come until I was all tired out, and then, when I finally succeeded in closing my eyes in slumber, I was troubled by the most outrageous dreams that ever fell to the lot of a mortal. Why, captain, when I awoke this morning I was bathed in a cold sweat!"

The captain looked serious.

"Well, I hope, major, that this bad night will not interfere with your aim, for I have an idea that this fellow is no slouch, as these miners say."

"Oh, no, don't worry about that," the major replied, with a nervous laugh, which had little merriment in it. "The moment I get in position and bring my rifle up to my shoulder I will be all right—my nerves will be as firm as a rock. Look ye, captain, I have made up my mind to kill this fellow. I am going to put a ball straight through his heart. The Black Snake people are friends of mine, and I will fix this desperado so that he will not trouble them any more."

By this time the pair had reached the spot where the major was to stand, and the captain took leave of him.

Morgan's mind was full of sad forebodings as he retraced his steps.

"The major is not himself at all," he muttered. "He is as nervous as a woman; he knows he is not up to the mark, too, and is only boasting to try to keep his spirits up. I wouldn't be in his place, and in such a condition, for a goldmine!"

"Now, then, gents, are you ready?" the old miner asked.

"Ready!" Teton Tom responded.

"Ready!" said the major.

Both had their rifles at their shoulders and their keen eyes were gleaming along the polished barrels.

The miner waited for a moment, then up into the air went the hand that held the pistol, and the sharp report of the weapon rung out clear and shrill.

Two similar sounds immediately followed, one a little behind the other.

Teton Tom had discharged his rifle promptly the moment the crack of the revolver reached his ears, but the major, owing to his nervousness, had hesitated for a moment.

That moment's delay cost the soldier dearly, for the adventurer, thinking him to be a dangerous opponent, had fired with a deadly aim.

The major too had tried to draw a "bead" on the heart of Teton Tom, but if his aim had been true, the moment's hesitation would have been fatal to his purpose, for the bullet of his opponent struck him just as he discharged his weapon, causing his arm to swerve, so that his bullet did not come within a yard of the man at whom it was aimed.

Teton Tom's missile though went directly to its mark.

The major, shot through the lungs, dropped his rifle, threw up his hands, staggered forward, then stumbled and fell upon his face.

The duel was ended.

Captain Morgan and the surgeon immediately hurried to the assistance of the fallen man, while Teton Tom dropped the butt of his rifle to the ground and waited for their report.

The face of the surgeon was grave after he examined the wound.

"I am afraid the major is mortally hurt," he said, to Captain Morgan.

The fallen man, whom the pair supposed to be in a swoon, opened his eyes at this.

"How long have I to live, doctor?" he asked.

"Oh, I don't know; it is not possible for me to say," the surgeon replied, evasively. "You



may be able to pull through all right with careful nursing."

"Oh, no; I know better than that; you must not attempt to deceive me. Have I twenty or thirty minutes of life left?"

"Yes, yes; you are hard hit, but, unless I am greatly mistaken, your life will be measured by hours, days, perhaps, instead of minutes."

"But there is not much hope of my pulling through?" the major demanded.

"Oh, yes, you may; it is impossible for me to say under the circumstances."

"I have time enough to make some little atonement," the major murmured, half to himself and half-aloud. "Why should I keep silent? The fight is ended as far as I am concerned, and I have a presentiment that this man is destined to win in the struggle. Why, then, should I contend longer when fate itself has entered the lists against me?"

During this speech the surgeon had been busily engaged in bandaging the wound.

"There, now you are all right," the doctor said. "We will fix up a litter and have you carried to the post."

"Ask Teton Tom to come here; I want to speak to him," the major said, abruptly.

"Be careful not to give way to any excitement," the surgeon continued.

"Oh, that is all right; I am perfectly cool and collected."

Teton Tom was summoned; he approached, and citizens gathered near, curious to witness the strange scene.

"Well, sir, you have done for me I reckon," the major remarked; he was in a half-reclining position, with his head resting on Captain Morgan's arm, who, kneeling, supported him.

"It is the fortune of war; the men who take the sword must perish by the sword."

"Oh, curse your Scripture!" exclaimed the soldier, testily. "Don't add insult to injury by telling me that I deserve to be killed! I know that I do, but I don't relish being reminded of it, all the same! Of course, it is justice, but 'no rogue e'er' felt the halter draw with good opinion of the law,' and I have been big enough rascal in my time to understand how much truth there is in the saying. But now I want to make a bargain with you. I have a daughter—if I die she will be left almost helpless, for I have been a reckless, improvident man, and have squandered my money as fast as I got it, thinking I would always have the Black Snake Mine to fall back on, but I begin to think now that you will win the fight for the mine, and so that is gone; if I aid you, will you do something for my girl after I am gone?"

"Yes, whether I win the fight or not—whether you aid me or not, you can depend upon my seeing that she does not want for anything while I live!" Teton Tom exclaimed, impulsively.

"I will take your word as I would take the oath of any other man," the soldier declared.

"You will win this fight, for you have justice on your side. Twenty years ago I was a poor man, heavily in debt, and threatened with the loss of my commission if my errors were discovered. To me came one Red Archy, a gambling desperado, who knew how I was situated, and he proposed a plot to steal the Black Snake Mine from Crawford, its owner. I joined hands with him and his gang, and we succeeded. I betrayed Crawford, who was my intimate friend, but managed my treachery so well that my share in the transaction was not suspected by any one. Red Archy is now known as Archibald Crawford, Mayor of Bearfoot Bar and president of the Black Snake Mining Company, and he has no more right to the property than I have to Fort Fremont. He is a scoundrel of the deepest dye, and he made a scoundrel out of me. He is the devil that tempted me into crime. But I have anticipated this explosion for years—in fact, we three men who were instrumental in stealing the mine and killing Randal Crawford, Red Archy, Black Bill Ricolls, and myself, have always been afraid that someday the son of Colonel Crawford would call us to an account."

At this point the strength of the major began to fail, and the surgeon insisted that he should not attempt to speak longer.

A rude litter was constructed, and upon it the wounded man was conveyed to the fort. Teton Tom and the rest returned to the town, but hardly had the two pards reached their headquarters when they were startled by a messenger who brought the news that there had been a fight between Archibald Crawford and the poor fool, Dumb Dickey; Crawford was dead, and Dumb Dickey dying.

The struggle had taken place at the cave-home of the old man.

Teton Tom, young Crawford and Doc Dick Johnston, accompanied by a crowd of miners at once hurried to the spot.

Dumb Dickey had been shot in the head, and the wound seemed to have transformed him into a fiend, for, seizing a huge stone, he had killed his assailant at a single blow.

The old man was going fast to the land of shadows, but as the doctor and the two pards knelt by his side the light of reason was in the eyes of the dying man.

The doctor examined the wound and made a discovery which he at once announced to the rest.

It was as he had thought: from an injury to his head Dumb Dickey's insanity had come, and the bullet of the assassin, although it had sapped the life of the attacked man, had restored his reason.

"I am glad you have come," the sufferer said, faintly. "I wanted to see you both before I died. At last I am myself again; the cloud which so long obscured my brain has passed away. George, I am your father—I am Randal Crawford."

This astounded the hearers.

"And you, who are you?" he continued, to Teton Tom. "Your face is not strange to me, for when I look into it the face of my youth comes back again."

"I am your eldest son—the child of the Crow girl whom you wedded by the banks of the Teton River in the long ago!"

"Thank God! I see you both once again!" the old man murmured, pressing their hands warmly.

They were his last words—his last moment on earth, for, with a long-drawn sigh, his spirit fled.

The mystery which had so puzzled young Crawford was now explained. Teton Tom was his half-brother; fate had brought the two together and afforded the elder an opportunity to serve the younger.

It was fated to be a day of surprises, for on returning to the camp Cherry Labarge was encountered. She had just come from the death-bed of Black Bill, and she made the pards acquainted with the facts that the wounded ruffian had disclosed to her.

"I had a suspicion that I would find the man I sought in Bearfoot Bar, after I discovered why he was in the East, dabbling in the assassin's trade," Teton Tom remarked.

Then he inquired what the girl intended to do, and Cherry replied she intended to keep on in the cigar business. Black Bill had left everything to her, so she was in a measure independent.

A few more words, and our tale is told.

After the death of Archibald Crawford and Black Bill Ricolls, and the confession of Major Cadwalader, no one was bold enough to attempt to dispute George Crawford's claim to the Black Snake property, so he took possession of the mine, and one of his first acts, after he got the property, was to deed a clear one-half of it to Teton Tom, although the adventurer protested that he did not want it.

Major Cadwalader did not die of his wound, but it made an old man of him, and he soon retired on half-pay, and both he and his daughter disappeared from Montana, and it is to be hoped that the old soldier repented of the deeds done in his hot youth.

And now we lay the pen aside, yet at some future time we hope to again use it in describing some new adventures that fell to the lot of the white Crow chief, the Half-Blood, Teton Tom.

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